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The Trials, Tribulations, and Celebrations of Younger LGB Couples in Long-term Relationships

A thesis submitted to The Open University for

the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Sciences

by

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30th June 2015

Abstract

This thesis explores the long-term relationship experiences of younger LGB couples. It builds upon existing knowledge and understandings of LGB couple relationships and the lives of younger adults. The study utilised multiple qualitative methods informed by social science research on intimate relationships whilst appraising the biographical, socio-cultural, and temporal contexts within which LGB couple relationship experiences are situated. The research highlights the importance of attending to how couples 'do' their relationships as well as the 'practices' which sustain them. Findings emphasise the interconnected dimensions of time, space, and intimacy as resources for sustaining couple relationships, with analysis underlining the role of the 'relational present' as a lens for understanding everyday relationship experiences. It provides insight into how couples negotiate their everyday lives through relationship work, to facilitate connection, and to maintain and cultivate personal autonomy alongside their couple identity. The temporal horizons of the past and the future inform relationship experiences in different ways, increasing understanding of relating behaviours and signifying a commitment to a shared future. Such futures included marriage/civil partnership, children, and buying homes. Experiences were embedded in the context of participant biography, the wider relationships and communities of the couple, and the current zeitgeist of increased acceptance and civil rights for LGB individuals in the UK. The thesis concludes by discussing the findings in terms of age, reciprocity, relationship resources, and gender.

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Contents

Chapter 1 : Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Project Background.....	4
1.3 Research Questions	5
1.4 Research Overview	6
1.5 Research Contexts	6
1.5.1 Biographical Context.....	6
1.5.2 Socio-Cultural and Temporal Contexts	11
1.5.3 Relationship Support Context.....	18
1.6 Reflexive Positioning.....	22
1.7 Thesis Outline	25
Chapter 2 : Literature Review	29
2.1 Introduction	29
2.2 Long-Term Relationships	30
2.3 Relationship Practices.....	33
2.3.1 Legal Recognition.....	33
2.3.2 LGB Parenting and Family Planning	37
2.3.3 The Home and Division of Labour	41
2.3.4 Intimacy	44
2.3.5 Love.....	51
2.3.6 Relationship Rules	54

2.4 Relationships and Communities	57
2.4.1 Marginalisation and Discrimination	58
2.4.2 Family and Friendships	62
2.5 Relationship Support.....	64
2.6 Time and Space in Relationships.....	69
2.7 Conclusion	69
Chapter 3 : Methodology	71
3.1 Introduction	71
3.2 Design.....	71
3.3 The Key Studies	73
3.4 Fieldwork with LGB Couples	75
3.4.1 Participants	75
3.4.2 Recruitment	79
3.4.3 Methods	79
3.4.4 Initial Meeting	80
3.4.5 Emotion Maps	81
3.4.6 Visual Scrapbooks/Diaries.....	82
3.4.7 Individual Interviews.....	85
3.4.8 Couple Interviews - Photo Collage Elicitation	86
3.5 Fieldwork with Relationship Support Counsellors	89
3.5.1 Participants	89
3.5.2 Recruitment	91
3.5.3 Method	91

3.6 Field Notes	92
3.7 Data Analysis.....	93
3.8 Ethics.....	95
3.9 Conclusion	97
Chapter 4 : Time and the Relational Present.....	98
4.1 Analysis Overview	98
4.2 Introduction: Time and the Relational Present	99
4.3 Time as a Resource in the Relational Present	101
4.3.1 Time as a Resource for Relationship Work.....	102
4.3.2 Time as a Resource for Connection	109
4.3.3 Time as a Resource for Personal Autonomy.....	115
4.4 The Power of the Past.....	118
4.5 Conclusion	125
Chapter 5 : Time – The Relationship Future	127
5.1 Introduction	127
5.2 Relationship Longevity.....	127
5.3 Legal Recognition: Marriage and Civil Partnership.....	134
5.4 Children, Parenthood, and Family Planning	140
5.4.1 Children.....	141
5.4.2 Pets	151
5.5 Conclusion	156
Chapter 6 : Space.....	158
6.1 Introduction	158

6.2 The Home	159
6.2.1 The Home as Couple Space	159
6.2.2 The Home as Shared Space	171
6.3 Public/Private Spaces	179
6.3.1 Relationship Support.....	180
6.3.2 Experiences of Discrimination.....	185
6.4 Conclusion	189
Chapter 7 : Intimacy.....	191
7.1 Introduction	191
7.2 Conceptualisations of Intimacy.....	191
7.3 Emotional Intimacy	193
7.3.1 The Couple Dynamic	193
7.3.2 Intimate Closeness	200
7.3.3 The Couple Team	203
7.4 Physical Affection.....	205
7.5 Sexual Intimacy	211
7.5.1 Meanings of Sex	211
7.5.2 Sex and Relationship Rules	219
7.6 Intimate Practices	225
7.7 Conclusion	228
Chapter 8 : Conclusion	230
8.1 Situating the TTC Study	230
8.2 Discussion of Key Findings	233

8.2.1 Age Cohort Experiences	234
8.2.2 Reciprocity	238
8.2.3 Relationship Resources.....	240
8.2.4 Gender	242
8.3 Future Directions	244
8.4 Researcher Reflections	249
8.5 Concluding Remarks	251
References	253
Appendices	289
Appendix 1 - LGB Participant Consent Form	289
Appendix 2 - LGB Participant Information Sheet.....	290
Appendix 3 - LGB Participant Method Sheet.....	294
Appendix 4 - LGB Participant Demographic Questionnaire	299
Appendix 5 - LGB Participant Debrief Sheet.....	307
Appendix 6 - Counsellor Participant Consent Form	309
Appendix 7 - Counsellor Participant Information Sheet.....	311
Appendix 8 - Counsellor Participant Demographic Questionnaire.....	315
Appendix 9 - Counsellor Focus Group Schedule.....	317
Appendix 10 - Analysis Coding Framework	319
Appendix 11 – Research Question Development.....	321

List of Tables

Table 3.1 LGB Participant Demographic Data	77
Table 3.2 Demographic Information on Counsellor Participants	90

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Socio-Legal and Political Timeline and Infographics	13
Figure 3.1 Example Emotion Map	82
Figure 3.2 Example Visual Scrapbook/Diary	85
Figure 3.3 Example Photo Collage using Pinterest	88
Figure 4.1 Conceptual Framework for Analysis	98
Figure 5.1 Photo Collage Images.....	129
Figure 5.2 LGB Participants Civil Partnership and Same-Sex Marriage Status.....	134
Figure 6.1 Daniel Emotion Map	171
Figure 6.2 Public/Private Boundaries Collage from Thomas and Greg.....	179
Figure 7.1 Kim and Emma Photo Collage Image	204

Chapter 1 : Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In this thesis, entitled 'The Trials, Tribulations, and Celebrations of Younger LGB Couples in Long-Term Relationships' (the TTC study), I present my research on younger Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) couples. It builds upon existing knowledge and understandings of LGB couple relationships (Heaphy, Smart & Einarsdottir, 2013; Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001) and the experiences of younger adults in order to explore potentially important age and/or generational differences in relationship experience. The study utilises an approach informed by social science research on intimate relationships, and three key studies in particular (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Heaphy, et al., 2013; Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe & Thomson, 2007), whilst applying a social constructionist framework (Timulak, 2014) to appraise the influential biographical, socio-cultural, and temporal contexts in which relationship experiences are situated.

Despite high separation and divorce rates in the UK (Coleman & Glenn, 2009), it is estimated that 7 in 10 households are still headed by a married couple, and recent figures show an increase in rates of marriage and decrease in rates of divorce (Gabb & Fink, 2015; ONS, 2012). The couple relationship thus remains a central tenet of adult lived experience (Miller, 2012; Smart, 2007). In the social sciences, there is an array of research into relationships which has broadened knowledge and understanding, exploring areas such as conceptualisations of intimacy (Giddens, 1992; Jamieson, 1998), relationship formations and dating (Banker, Kaestle & Allen, 2010), relationship satisfaction and quality (Reynolds, Houlston & Coleman, 2014), intimate family relationships (Gabb, 2010a), same-sex marriage and relationship formalisation (Heaphy et al., 2013), and romantic love and emotions (Graham & Christensen, 2009; Mackey, Diemer & O'Brien, 2000). There is a notable trend in recent relationship research towards focusing on the causes of relationship breakdown (Coleman & Glenn, 2009), with reference to the impact of economic, social, and political uncertainty and change in Britain (Walker, Barrett, Wilson & Chang, 2010).

The last 40 years have seen vast changes in the formations of relationships (Budgeon & Roseneil, 2004). There is increasing acceptance of many forms of relationship outside the 'norm' of heterosexual marriage (Clarke, Ellis, Peel & Riggs, 2010), including cohabitation (Jamieson et al., 2002), couples living apart together (LATs) (Duncan & Phillips, 2011), same-sex relationships (Heaphy et al., 2013; Weeks et al., 2001), and non-monogamous relationships (Barker & Langdridge, 2010). These relationships are affected by and extended through networks of kinship and friendship outside of the couple (Smart, 2007; Weeks et al., 2001; Weston, 1991), offering numerous possibilities for individuals to construct and experience a diverse range of configurations (Heaphy, Donovan & Weeks, 2004). There is, therefore, a need to be attentive to the diversity of intimate relationships, to avoid reducing or grouping partnerships and/or relationship experiences into different 'types' of couple (Gabb & Fink, 2015).

There have also been significant changes in social policy and legislation for LGB individuals. There is more social, political, and legal support for LGB individuals and couples than ever before, with the UK having been identified as the most progressive country in Europe for LGBT rights (ILGA, 2015). Evidence from the British Social Attitudes survey indicates increasingly liberal views on homosexuality (Park, Bryson, Cleary, Curtice & Phillips, 2013). In the past decade alone the Civil Partnership Act (2004) has been introduced (Shipman & Smart, 2007) alongside revisions for same-sex partner parental recognition in the Human Embryology and Fertilisation Act (2008). The Equality Act (2010) consolidated all anti-discrimination policies ensuring equal rights in public and private service provision for nine protected characteristics including age, gender, and sexual orientation. In 2013, legal partnership recognition was extended still further through the introduction of same-sex marriage (Park et al., 2013). Coming into effect in March 2014, more than 1,400 couples were married by the end of June that year (ONS, 2014a). This stampede to the altar represents a shift in the debate on assimilation versus outrage regarding same-sex marriage. It is a stark contrast to 40 years ago where the possibility and desirability of marriage was beyond comprehension for LGB couples (Weeks, 2010). These seismic socio-cultural changes and shifting

policy contexts present a compelling backdrop for the study of LGB couples and their relationships, something that is returned to later in this chapter.

There is a substantial body of social science research into LGB couple relationships (Heaphy et al., 2013; Kurdek, 1991, 2006; Mackey, O'Brien, & Mackey, 1997; Solomon, Rothblum & Balsam, 2005; Thomas, 2014; Weeks et al., 2001), and a growing body of research on LGBTQ ageing (Cronin & King, 2010; Fredriksen-Goldsen & Muraco, 2010; Heaphy & Yip, 2003; Simpson, 2014). However, there is a lack of UK research on younger LGB couples in long-term relationships. Studies have shown that age may have a significant effect on individuals' perceptions of relationships (Rostosky, Galliher, Welsh & Kawaguchi, 2000), with the definition of 'long-term' meaning something different for younger adults as compared to older adults. There is additionally a need to attend to 'generational sexualities' where age represents a situated standpoint within particular socio-temporal contexts that can leverage insight into social moments and the embedded social meanings of sexual practices (Plummer, 2010). For example, one explanation of the increasingly liberal social attitudes towards sexuality (specifically premarital sex) and homosexuality is the presence of liberal younger generations (Park et al., 2013). Research from Heaphy et al. (2013) found that younger LGB couples tended to value the couple relationship over other adult relationships. This may reflect a resurgence of ideals about 'romantic' love (Wilkinson, 2012) or the increased equal rights and opportunities for LGB individuals (such as same-sex marriage) which reinforce the ideology of the couple (Gabb & Fink, 2015). Consequently, there may be key age and/or generational differences in relationship experience and understandings among young LGB couples in the current climate of the UK. This is particularly the case when reflecting on the socio-political context of LGB rights together with the individual biographies of young LGB couples. As Plummer (2010) argues, there are varying experiences within any one generation due to the intersections of other identities. Together, the biographical, socio-cultural, and temporal aspects of experience provide a backdrop to contextualise the diversity among couples.

The lack of research on younger LGB couples may indicate that there are fewer younger LGB individuals in relationships or it might be due to the varying definitions of 'young' within research contexts. Most UK studies on 'young' LGB individuals and/or couples use school age cohorts, focus on sex and relationship education (Donovan & Hester 2008; Formby 2011; Robinson, 2010), the impact of discrimination and bullying on mental health (McNamee, Lloyd & Schubotz, 2008; Scourfield, Roen & McDermott, 2008), or examine relationships as part of a larger focus on young people's lives (Henderson et al., 2007; Thomson, 2009). Recent research on civil partnerships has extended sampling parameters to facilitate analysis of the 'new' generations of LGB couples who have grown up in a more socially tolerant environment where 'relational citizenship' is possible (Heaphy et al., 2013; more information on the sample and methodology of this key study is outlined in Chapters 2 and 3).

My research aimed to extend understanding of younger adult LGB relationships within the same age cohort as Heaphy et al. (2013), exploring relationship experiences and understandings both within and outside of civil partnership and same-sex marriage. Throughout, I use the term 'younger' to situate the cohort (aged 20-38) as this encapsulates a varied group of individuals who talk about their age in a number of contrasting ways (discussed in the methodology chapter). In the remaining sections of this introduction, I explain the background to my investigation, present the research questions, and provide an overview of the research. The essential circumstances of participant relationship experience are outlined including the biographical, socio-cultural and temporal, and relationship support contexts. I then situate myself within the research and conclude by delineating the thesis structure, providing a brief summary of each chapter.

1.2 Project Background

The TTC study is affiliated with the *Enduring Love? Couple Relationships in the 21st Century* research project, through an Open University Chartered Studentship. The *Enduring Love? project*

(ESRC, RES-062-23-3056) explored the meanings, understandings, and experiences of adult couple relationships in contemporary Britain. The connection between the two projects means the research methods I used were informed by the *Enduring Love?* study and a component of the sample (n=4) is shared. My charter studentship is also part-funded by Relate, a relationship support organisation providing counselling and support to individuals, couples, and families (Relate, 2009). Relate was established over 70 years ago and now has over 70 centres across England and Wales, independently run at a local level (Relate, 2009). Relate's interest in supporting the research came from a desire to gain increased knowledge and understanding of LGB couple relationships which could have positive implications for service provision and counsellor training with respect to LGB couples. The link with Relate facilitated access to Relate staff and clients as potential participants. Throughout the research process, contact with Relate was necessary. Their involvement in the research led to an increased emphasis on relationship support in the TTC study. I reflect upon this in Chapter 8.

1.3 Research Questions

The TTC study had one overarching research question and three related sub-questions which sought to facilitate investigation of the lived experiences of younger LGB couples:

- 1) What are the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples in the UK?
 - a) How are these shaped by personal and/or socio-cultural understandings of 'long-term' and 'happy' relationships?
 - b) How do these couples manage and negotiate their everyday lives together?
 - c) What resources (for example, friends, family, counselling, and the research encounter) are available to support their relationship?

1.4 Research Overview

The research adopted a methodological approach informed by the growing body of research on intimate life (Gabb, 2010a; Gabb & Fink, 2015; Heaphy et al., 2013; Jamieson, 1998; Miller, 2012; Smart, 2007; Weeks et al., 2001) and drawing on a social constructionist framework (Ponterotto, 2005; Timulak, 2014). The TTC study employed a qualitative multiple methods approach involving interviews, diaries, emotion maps, and photo elicitation with younger LGB couples, as well as focus group interviews with counsellors from Relate. This is detailed in Chapter 3. Access to these two distinctive cohorts allowed exploration of the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples and the relationship support available to them. This enabled me to focus on the diverse personal, social, and structural resources that shape and situate younger LGB relationships. Gathering data on relationship counsellors' knowledge of LGB couple relationships and on LGB couples' notions of relationship support added an applied dimension to the research, also enabling me to feed back into Relate services.

1.5 Research Contexts

It is critical to interrogate the different contexts of participants' lives because relationship experiences are embedded in wider settings. In this section the relevant areas which frame the relationship experiences of LGB couples are discussed. These include the biographical factors which affect personal accounts of relationships, the socio-cultural and temporal contexts of the lives of younger LGB couples, and avenues of relationship support such as family and friends and relationship support agencies.

1.5.1 Biographical Context

Focusing on the biographical contexts of younger LGB couples in the TTC study is crucial because relationship experiences can converge and/or diverge depending on individual differences. Biographical context refers to the personal circumstances of the participants. Characteristics that affect the beliefs, values, and behaviours within and about relationships are explored. These

include the manner in which 'scripts' and ideologies can impact upon relationship experiences. Identity and individual differences are discussed together with the concepts of relationality (Smart, 2007) and social capital (Putnam, 1993) to exemplify how biography can interconnect with mobility and socio-cultural influences to create diverse relationship experiences.

An individual's biography comprises several factors such as personal experiences, identity, location, and embeddedness in social networks, with each individual having different experiences due to their interplay. For the younger LGB couples in this research, significant biographical factors might include identity markers (e.g. age, sexual orientation, gender, or relationship status), or personal experiences such as their upbringing, experiences of their parents' relationships, or previous relationships. Whilst similarities in biography exist amongst the sample, how an individual weaves their identity into a narrative will differ. Giddens (1991) believes individuals are participating in a 'reflexive project of self'. Self-identity is worked and reworked through biographical narrative, enabling individuals to self-consciously and reflectively make sense of their life, actions, and surroundings (Gauntlett, 2008).

A notable influence on this understanding comes from the culture of individuals, which informs aspects of identity, desire, relationships, and emotions (Weeks et al., 2001). Berger and Kellner (1984) propose that individuals develop definitions of reality or 'scripts' based on socialisation. Simon and Gagnon (1987, 2004) discuss three types of scripts – cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intra-psychic scripts. These 'scripts' affect how individuals view, approach, and experience the world including their relationships, depending on how they are taken up by individuals (Heaphy et al., 2013; Simon & Gagnon, 1987). Heaphy et al. (2013) extend the understanding of scripts by applying them to couple relationships through the ideas of 'personal scripts' and 'couple scripts'. Personal scripts are the individual's ways of relating brought into relationships (intra-psychic scripts) and couple scripts are the ways in which interactions shape and reshape relating behaviours (interpersonal scripts). The uptake of scripts is dependent on

personal experiences, personality, and demographic factors and the relationships in which they are embedded. In this sense, biographies are inherently relational (and therefore social) as they are 'formed, rehearsed, and reshaped' over time through connections with others (Heaphy et al., 2013). The concepts of 'relational ideology' (Ringer, 2001), 'framing rules and feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979), and 'biographical anchors' (Heaphy et al., 2013) inform individual biographies and contextualise relationship experiences.

A 'relational ideology' refers to a set of normative assumptions which frame and regulate relationship practices (Ringer, 2001). For example, an individual who practices monogamy will have a different relational ideology from someone in a non-monogamous relationship. Linked to this is the concept of Hochschild's (1979) 'framing rules and feeling rules' whereby an individual's relational ideology informs the framework of their reaction to differing circumstances. The 'feeling rules' employed for certain situations will vary depending on the ideological framework. For instance, continuing with the monogamy/non-monogamy distinction, sex outside of a relationship might be approached with different feeling rules by a person who practices monogamy compared to an individual with a non-monogamous relational ideology. This has implications for what potential feelings might occur in such a situation, for example negative feelings might be experienced by the individual within the monogamous framework but not the individual in a non-monogamous relationship. Concurrent with the idea of relational ideologies and framing rules is the concept of 'biographical anchors' (Heaphy et al., 2013). These refer to past and/or personal experiences which shape relationship experiences or individual ways of relating. An example might be parental divorce which could affect an individual's ideology concerning the ability to maintain long-term relationships. The role of the social is vital as biographies are moulded through social exchanges and connections with others (Heaphy et al., 2013; Smart, 2007).

Individuals are embedded in a 'web of relationships' within which a sense of personhood can be derived through interactions with others (Smart, 2007). The extent to which this embeddedness and relationality might affect the biographical narratives and relationship experiences of the younger LGB couples in the TTC study can be explored through the intersections of demographic factors. For young people relationships are a central part of their lives (Sharpe, 2001) and there are prominent differences between how younger and older people experience the world due to increasing socio-cultural changes and economic instability (Walker et al., 2010). This is discussed in the next section. Other aspects of identity such as class, gender, and sexual orientation all interact with age in complex ways for young people, as shown, for example, by the *Inventing Adulthoods* study (Henderson et al., 2007). LGB participants were more likely to leave home at an earlier age to seek out support from other LGB individuals. Identity and demographic characteristics can therefore be seen as crucial in shaping relationships such as the higher mobility rate among the young LGB cohort. The connectedness of relationships is notable, as mobility might be affected by and has implications for the networks available to support relationship experiences. These networks and the embeddedness of relationships can be examined through 'social capital' (Putnam, 1993).

Social capital refers to the relationships people have with others, their communities, services, and institutions (Stone, 2003). There are two types relevant to the embeddedness of relationships – 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital (Putnam, 1993, 2000). Bonding social capital refers to social networks cemented through belonging to a specific group, whereas bridging social capital denotes more far reaching networks with fewer ties to specific groups (Putnam, 2000). Research has demonstrated young people utilise social capital in their life transitions to construct their identities (Holland, Reynolds & Weller, 2007). Henderson et al. (2007) highlight how an individual's choices can be constrained by location, resources, and mobility depending on whether they have strong ties to the family/community (bonding social capital) or larger networks (bridging social capital) available to them. For example, low social mobility and strong family ties

(bonding social capital) can inhibit young people's ambitions and life course trajectories such as attending university and achieving occupational success (Taylor, 2009). Social capital also has complex interactions with wider structural factors (Holland et al., 2007). Research findings suggest that if individuals have limited or poor levels of social capital they are more likely to have poorer health outcomes, lower educational attainment, and family disruption such as parental divorce (Stone & Hughes, 2002). Such findings may be due to having low levels of support available through fewer ties to the community.

Social capital, therefore, has implications for the networks of relationships in the lives of younger LGB couples, forming the influential social and cultural resources that contribute to an individual's biographical narrative. The role of these networks as resources is outlined in the relationship support context (and discussed in Chapter 2). Levels of embeddedness in these networks, in turn, might affect life transitions, levels of mobility, available resources, and the relationships which inform relational ideologies, framing and feeling rules, and biographical anchors. Furthermore, experiences and understandings of life transitions within relationships such as same-sex marriage, having children, and buying a house will differ depending on the interactions of these facets of biography. For example, age, gender, and income might feature in a young woman's decision about family-making. Having children is not cost-neutral for LGB couples, as the costs of In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) are high. Personal experiences, such as poor relationships with parents, can diminish personal resources through lack of role models. This lack of social capital can adversely affect the level of support available throughout transitions to parenthood.

As a consequence, the biographical contexts of younger LGB couples affect how they experience and understand relationships. The different facets of biographies including demographic factors, identity, personal and couple scripts, embeddedness, and relationality (including social capital and social support), and personal experiences interlink to create a unique environment for each individual. This specificity of circumstances needs to be acknowledged when analysing narratives

of relationship experience. Biography is also entrenched in the socio-cultural and temporal contexts of individuals; the effects of which are explored below, with particular focus on social policy and legislation, the economic climate, and the omnipresence of popular culture.

1.5.2 Socio-Cultural and Temporal Contexts

As with the importance of attending to biography, socio-cultural and temporal contexts are vital when exploring the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples, as these affect participants in many ways. These include how social norms and scripts might inform definitions of ‘long-term’ and ‘happy’ relationships, and how social policy, the media, and social attitudes might impact everyday experiences of relationships. In turn, these may represent a resource that couples can potentially use for relationship support. This section examines the effects of the socio-cultural and temporal contexts on younger LGB couples’ relationship experiences. It begins with exploring current LGB relationship rights, notably equality, civil partnership/marriage, and parenting/adoption, before considering the effect of the political and economic climate and the role of the media.

The socio-cultural and temporal settings of participant experience within the TTC study were interlinked and appeared to be highly influential in how individuals perceived and understood their long-term relationships. These contexts refer to the diverse ways in which social interactions might impact upon the experiences of participants. Connections with others, including, for example, family members, friends, colleagues, communities, or strangers, are always inevitable in the social world of individuals (Aspers, 2010; Plummer, 2010). In the previous section, I discussed how interactions could inform participant biographies, thereby demonstrating how biographical narratives are relational and social. In this section, the focus is on the social and cultural imaginary. Carol Smart (2007) referred to the cultural imaginary as the way in which relationships and thoughts occur in one’s perception. Imaginings exist in social, cultural, and historical contexts through shared meanings which produce and reproduce assumptions, norms, and social mores

(Heaphy et al., 2013; Smart, 2007). The concept of cultural scripts becomes relevant in understanding LGB relationship experiences (Simon & Gagnon, 2004) because LGB couples are experiencing a very different society to previous generations (Heaphy et al., 2013; Weeks, 2010). Continuities and changes in the social and cultural imaginaries are therefore imperative, especially in a time period of increasing acceptance of LGB relationships.

Figure 1.1 displays the socio-legal and political timeline of social policy and legislation changes for LGB individuals in addition to notable changes to education, and significant moments in popular culture. These factors contextualise the relationship experiences of the younger LGB couples in this study whilst situating them in historical contexts of continuity and change.

Figure 1.1 Socio-Legal and Political Timeline and Infographics

	1960s	1980s	1990s	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2010	2013	2014
LGBT Rights in the UK	1967 – Homo-sexuality de-criminalised		1994 - Age of consent lowered to 18	Age of consent lowered to 16			Gender Recognition Act	Buggery and Gross Indecency abolished from Sexual Offences Act	The Equality Act 2006	The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007		Equality Act 2010 covering all LGBT access to goods and services		
Marriage							Civil Partnership Act passed						Same-Sex Marriage Bill passed	Civil partnership conversion passed
Children						Equal adoptive rights given to LGB couples					Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act Passed			
Edu-cation		1988 – Section 28 introduced	1998 – Tuition Fees introduced £1000			Section 28 repealed	Higher Education Act 2004		Variable Tuition Fees – upped to £3000			Tuition fee cap upped to £9000		
Popular Culture	1985 - first gay character Brookside	1989 - First gay kiss East-Enders	1990 – First Gay Pride 1994 - Brookside Lesbian kiss	1999 – TV show Queer as Folk begins			TV Show – The L Word released	Film – Brokeback Mountain released						TV shows launched - Cucumber Banana Tofu



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The relationship experiences of the younger LGB couples in the TTC study reflect the sexual zeitgeist that has generated increasing acceptance of and options for LGB individuals and queer relationships in the UK. The figure overleaf shows how far LGB rights have come since homosexuality was deemed a criminal offence. Following the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the past 20 years have seen the age of consent decreased to 16, repeal of Section 28, and the outlawing of discrimination against LGBT individuals in the military services. The introduction of the Equality Act in 2010 affords more legal protection for LGB individuals than ever before (Park et al., 2013). However, marginalisation of and discrimination against LGB individuals and couples still exist (Ellis, 2009) and there remains a significant body of literature on this, which is discussed in Chapter 2.

The topic of civil partnership, and more recently same-sex marriage, has shifted public opinion and shaped LGB partnership formations. It has structured how LGB couples live and love, and afforded civil rights and social recognition. Civil partnership (CP) has been legal since December 2005 (Shipman & Smart, 2007) and the number of CPs registered between it coming into effect and the end of 2010 was over 42,000 (Ross, Gass & Berrington, 2011). Recent legislation brought into effect in December 2014 authorised civilly-partnered LGB couples to convert their CP licence into a marriage. There are, however, no plans to extend civil partnership to opposite-sex couples despite some interest (Mason, 2014). A test case currently challenging this may yet change this distinction.

New legislation effectively means LGB couples are treated the same as opposite-sex couples (Stonewall, 2012a), which has opened out legal and cultural recognition of parenting options for LGB couples. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 enables LGB couples who conceived children during their relationship (from 6 April 2009) to name both partners on the birth certificate, thus ensuring both parents are legally recognised. There has never been a specific law prohibiting LGB individuals from adopting children. In November 2002, however, the

Adoption and Children Act was passed letting unmarried couples, including LGB couples, lawfully apply to adopt a child in England or Wales (Stonewall, 2012a). Other options for LGB individuals to become parents include surrogacy, joint parenting arrangements, and IVF for female couples (Park et al., 2013). Unsurprisingly, there are inherent differences between male and female couples (Williams & Saunders, 2007). These considerations contextualise family planning options available to the younger LGB couples in the TTC study.

Over the past 15 years, as discussed above, social policy and legislation have significantly extended LGB rights. The increase in social tolerance and equal rights makes this a crucial time within which to explore LGB couples. Alongside the impact of social policy and legislation, other factors such as temporal and economic contexts, and experiences in relation to housing, finances, education, and work, may influence the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples.

Relationships in the UK are experienced within current temporal contexts where they need to be 'worked at', are more fluid and less stable, and where futures are uncertain (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Giddens, 1991; Ryan, 2005; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013). This is connected to growing instability in the economy, which has repercussions with respect to work, education, and housing, particularly for young people (Hills, Cunliffe, Obolenskaya, & Karagiannaki, 2015). In turn, these affect the lived experiences of the younger LGB participants. Considering employment, there are high levels of job insecurity with workers increasingly being placed on zero-hour contracts, and disproportionately high levels of unemployment and lower incomes among young people (Hills et al., 2015). The participants who took part in the TTC study will not have access to their state pension until they are 68 (ONS, 2014b). With respect to education, the price of attending university has been increasing since 1998 and reached its highest ever level with tuition fees capped at £9000 per year in 2010. The Institute of Fiscal Studies predicts that most people will struggle to pay back their £27,000 student debts (Weale, 2014) especially in light of the instability of labour markets. The housing market presents similar financial uncertainties for young people,

with the average age of the first time buyer currently standing at 30 (Blackmore, 2014). In the last 30 years this has only risen by 3 years, however, individuals buying their first home today are expected to put down a deposit which represents 82% of their annual income compared to the 12% first time buyers paid in 1983 (Blackmore, 2014). The number of first time buyers is at a seven year high (Brignall, 2014), but two-thirds of first time buyers are borrowing money from their parents in order to become homeowners (Kirk, 2014). This housing landscape adversely impacts those without social capital and/or economic resources and further separates groups along traditional 'class' lines.

In contrast with progressive sexuality legislation, the current economic climate paints a rather bleak picture for younger people, especially those from less privileged backgrounds. The younger LGB couples in the TTC study arguably have fewer and harder material choices than previous generations. The reality of the present, and ambitions for the future, such as career aspirations or training for jobs, educational attainment, property ownership, and desires for marriage and/or children, all need to be situated within these temporal and economic contexts. These environments intersect with biographies to create specific sets of circumstances among and between participants. For example, lower levels of social capital and income will decrease the possibility of home ownership and may also affect uptake of higher education or ability to repay student loans already accrued. This means that there may be as many differences within the cohort as there are similarities.

Another area of the social and cultural imaginary which influences younger LGB couples today comes from the media wherein cultural scripts are portrayed. The prominent idea of 'the couple' is continually reinforced in popular culture, on TV, online, and in print (Eldén, 2012; Figs, 2010; Lindqvist, 1996). The role of technology in the ever-connected lives of individuals today is significant, with social media becoming a popular tool for connecting with others, in the building and maintenance of relationships (e.g. online dating), and leading to an explosion of online self-

representation (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Henderson, 2011; Kietzmann, Silvestre, McCarthy, & Pitt, 2012). Young people are constantly exposed to relationship issues and experiences, whether it is a new celebrity couple, infidelity scandal or break-up. Media reports saturate their everyday worlds.

In a positive vein, for LGB individuals and couples, there are now more 'out' role models than ever before and growing numbers of LGB characters in films and TV programmes. This provides significant opportunities for younger LGB individuals. Greater diversity in available role models can facilitate positive identifications, diminish marginalisation, and disincline people from discriminating (Gomillion & Guiliano, 2011). TV shows such as *Orange is the New Black* and *The L Word* feature prominent LGB storylines and characters, as do British soaps and dramas, all of which attract large audiences. Considerable progress has been made in the visibility and representation of LGB characters and relationships on British TV since the first gay characters and gay/lesbian kisses in *Brookside* and *Eastenders* in 1985 and 1989/1994 respectively. From the controversy of *Queer as Folk* in 1999 and the attention directed towards *Brokeback Mountain* in 2005, to the most recent examples in Channel 4's TV shows *Banana*, *Cucumber*, and *Tofu*, there are portrayals of sophisticated interconnections between LGB individuals, including nuanced portrayals of relationships and sex. This includes experiences of growing old, different generations and changing contexts of LGB culture such as the use of technology (hook-up smartphone apps like Grindr), and the associated power dynamics (Wollaston, 2015). Likewise, the popularity of many LGB celebrity figures such as Ellen DeGeneres, Claire Balding, Alan Carr, Stephen Fry, and Graham Norton, and the intense media coverage of younger celebrities coming out, including Tom Daley and Ellen Page, point to the increasing visibility of LGB individuals and lives. This has the effect of normalising LGB relationships and provides affirming cultural scripts that may influence the younger LGB couples in the TTC study.

Combined, these socio-cultural and temporal factors provide a distinguishable backdrop for the relationship experiences and understandings of younger LGB couples. They intersect with differing aspects of biography, thereby creating opportunities for 'couple diversity' (Gabb & Fink, 2015). These contexts are central when appraising how LGB individuals and couples perceive and engage with social and cultural imaginaries and experience the many aspects of their relationships and lives. Life events, transitions, and everyday activities embedded in these relationship experiences can often cause tension and are 'stressors' which couples need to navigate, and where, at times, relationship support may be needed (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Relate, 2009; Walker et al., 2010).

1.5.3 Relationship Support Context

In order to fully consider the resources available to younger LGB couples, and thereby address the third sub-question of the research, avenues of relationship support need to be contextualised. The focus of this section therefore is the sources of support framing the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples in the TTC study. This begins with an outline of support from family and friends before moving on to the ways in which social policy and third sector relationship support organisations impact the experience of contemporary queer coupledness.

Relationship support refers to the support, care, information, education, and counselling available to aid in the strengthening and maintenance of relationships. This often comes from family, friends and peers, as well as services and relationship support organisations (Relationships Alliance, 2014). For the younger LGB couples in the TTC study, partners, families, and friendships were identified as paramount sources of relationship support. Whereas considerable research has focused on coming out and isolation from families of origin among LGB individuals (Weeks et al., 2001), the interplay of the biographical, socio-cultural, and temporal factors of relationship experience outlined above led many participants to maintain close relationships with family members. This diverges from the experiences of previous generations of LGB individuals who

were more likely to be estranged from families of origin due to their sexual orientation (Weeks et al., 2001). In this respect, couples have larger social networks of families and friendships available to facilitate support for their relationships, particularly during periods of distress and conflict (Relationship Alliance, 2014). These wider social networks and communities are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 (and analysed in Chapter 6). They are important because the majority of participants stated that the first source of support outside of the primary relationship was family members or friends. However, if problems were more serious or recurring professional support and interventions were sought.

Research has shown that couples are rarely experienced as a discrete dyad (Gabb & Fink, 2015), and that there are often third parties impacting on the primary couple. Third parties might include family members, friendships, additional lovers or sexual partners, work and work colleagues, pets, and hobbies/interests. Connections outside of the couple are mostly seen to strengthen the quality of relationships (Relationships Alliance, 2014; Sherwood, Kneale, & Bloomfield, 2014), although the possibility of conflict through the presence of other people also needs to be considered (e.g. partner infidelity, see Vossler & Moller, 2014). Findings from social network and social support literature suggest healthy relationships with partners, family members, and peers have a positive impact on mental and physical health (Heaney & Israel, 2008; Mattson & Hall, 2011). Networks of support can also act as shock absorbers or buffers for strain (Cohen & Wills, 1985) and have a wider beneficial impact on society (ONS, 2015; Relationships Alliance, 2014; Sherwood et al., 2014). These wider societal benefits of positive relationships include increased work engagement (Burnett, Coleman, Houlston, & Reynolds, 2012), provision of care (White, 2013), stronger parent-child relationships leading to better outcomes for children (Coleman & Glenn, 2009), and higher achievements at school for children (Harold, Aitken, & Shelton, 2007). As may be expected, a lack of, or insufficient, social support has many potentially negative implications, such as feelings of isolation and loneliness, negative health behaviours and issues with mental health (Relationships Alliance, 2014).

Over the last decade, the focus of social policy has been on strengthening family relationships (Relationships Alliance, 2014), with families with children being prioritised over adult couple relationships (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Klett-Davies, 2012). In 2007, the Labour government led increased backing for relationship support services stemming from research reports advising the importance of stable family relationships (DfCSF, 2007; DfCSF, 2010; DfES, 2003; Walker et al., 2010). Since 2010, the coalition Conservative and Liberal Democrat government has maintained a strong emphasis on adult family relationships, aiming to improve access to relationship support services and to encourage people to form stable relationships through marriage and civil partnerships (Klett-Davies, 2012) or same-sex marriage (Gabb & Fink, 2015). While this indicates LGB individuals are no longer situated outside the norms of society, many people criticise these policies as privileging married or civil partnered couples whilst economically and socially excluding single people and non-married couples (Klett-Davies, 2012; Toynbee, 2011). This reiterates ideals surrounding 'mononormativity' (Ritchie & Barker, 2006) and 'compulsory coupledness' (Wilkinson, 2013). The emphasis on strengthening family relationships largely comes as a response to the adverse financial impacts of separation and family breakdown (Relationship Alliance, 2014) estimated to cost £46 billion a year (Relationships Foundation, 2014).

More recently, there appears to be an acknowledgement of the pertinence of supporting relationships for reasons other than just financial, such as the emotional impact of life events and transitions. At a Relationship Summit in 2014, Prime Minister David Cameron stated that all domestic policies would be subjected to a 'family test' to assess their impact on family relationships. There was cross party support for the Relationships Alliance Manifesto (Gabb & Fink, 2015) which brings together the four leading UK relationship support organisations - Relate, Marriage Care, One Plus One, and the Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships (Relationship Alliance, 2014). The priorities identified within the manifesto broaden the scope of policy to include support for life transitions and stressors (Walker et al., 2010), and to provide the

government with alternative policy recommendations to strengthen family, couple, and social relationships (Relationships Alliance, 2014). These recommendations include considering the barriers which prevent individuals, couples, and families from accessing relationship support, such as cultural, financial, and systemic factors. The relationship support context links to the biographical and socio-cultural contexts of relationship experience where seeking support is associated with stigma (Mattson & Hall, 2011; Walker et al., 2010). Relationship support services are expensive and hard to access through the NHS (Relationship Alliance, 2014), whilst accessing relationship support services can also be concerning for LGB individuals and couples due to fears of negative experiences. This consideration is salient when examining the literature recounting LGB experiences of counselling and psychotherapy, as LGB individuals have been pathologised due to their sexual identities (Evans & Barker, 2010; Galgut, 2005). This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Mainstream relationship support organisations such as Relate are addressing potential problems with providing quality support to LGB individuals and couples through research (such as their support of the TTC study), the development of sexual diversity modules within routine training, and through regulating service provision. One such initiative is PACE's (an LGBT charity) eQuality Mark Award. The eQuality award is a quality mark for mainstream relationship services which demonstrates a provision of high quality service for LGBT individuals (eQuality, 2011). Relate centres across the UK are striving to achieve this award to improve service provision for LGB individuals and couples.

Thus, LGB individuals and couples have access to a variety of avenues for relationship support. This appears to be improving as social attitudes towards LGB individuals progress, creating larger social networks of support from families, friends, and communities. Social policy and third sector organisations are becoming more accessible, promoting increased equality and more positive experiences of accessing relationship support services. Social networks of family, friends, and

communities, and professional support services represent vital and accessible sources of relationship support for couples. Examining how couples utilise these support networks in their everyday lives and in times of distress provides insight into the experiences of LGB couples. This support can feed into the couple dynamic, helping to maintain and cultivate relationships over time.

1.6 Reflexive Positioning

The final context I want to draw attention to is my own reflexive standpoint. In this section, I situate the TTC study in the context of the research process. My personal identity, experiences, social and cultural location, and psyche have inevitably impacted upon my interpretation of others' lives (Merrill & West, 2009). The concepts of insider and outsider research will now be considered with reference to points of similarity and difference and the ways in which I practised reflexive research (Finch, 1984; Gabb & Singh, 2014; Kanuha, 2000).

This thesis is about younger LGB couples. There are clear points of identification here for me. I am a lesbian, a woman, white British, and within the age group of the LGB participants (20-38). I come from a working class background with parents who are divorced and I have experience of three monogamous relationships which I define as long-term. During the course of the research I experienced the breakdown of a relationship and began a new monogamous relationship. These characteristics situate me in a distinctive position where I am sensitive to many different contexts including the effects of class, gender, and sexual orientation on relationship experiences (Gabb, 2004; Yardley, 2000). These sensitivities include the potential to overcome middle class researcher bias when examining the lives and loves of working class individuals (Back, 2007, cited in Gabb & Fink, 2015), although this is not to say that working class bias did not occur with middle class participants. The sample was relatively evenly split between middle class and working class participants. However, I recognise there is diversity in class-based experiences. For example, my experiences are not necessarily the same as other working-class individuals.

As a researcher with an interlinked dual role as learner and researcher, I recognise research involves continual learning (Merrill & West, 2009), and as an early career researcher my limited experience of conducting interviews and focus groups may have had a particular effect on data production (Morgan, 1996). My identity characteristics impacted my motivations for conducting the research, and the project offered me the opportunity to develop knowledge and understanding of the lives of people with similar experiences to myself (Kanuha, 2000). These contexts undoubtedly affected the research design, data collection, and analysis. These personal factors assume greater relevance when examining similarities and differences and the potentials of being an 'insider' or an 'outsider' in the research interaction (Gabb & Singh, 2014).

In fieldwork with LGB couples, my lesbian identity and my age served to ensure my 'insider' status, but my gender identity as a woman may have produced some interesting and contrasting interactions with male participants. Throughout fieldwork with LGB couples, I did not explicitly disclose my sexual orientation. The 'inside information' I displayed surrounding LGB socio-cultural and political contexts, the presentation of my own identity within the research interactions and the very fact I was even doing the research (Kanuha, 2000; Tewksbury & Gagne, 1997), led me to believe that explicitly disclosing my sexual orientation was unnecessary. This decision was validated during interviews where participants communicated a judgement or assumption of my non-heterosexual identity. I received questions such as '*you've been to [Gay] Pride haven't you?*' (Jared), and '*you've watched the L Word right?*' (Rose). These echoed the experiences of Kanuha (2000), whereby I often found myself not needing participants to elaborate because I already knew what they meant. Conversely, I did disclose my sexual orientation to the counsellor focus group participants. This may have had implications where I was perceived as an 'outsider' in the first two focus groups and as an 'insider' in the final focus group which comprised LGB counsellors (Kitzinger, 1994; Smithson, 2000). However, my professional status as a researcher and my being at least 20 years younger than the counsellor participants is likely to have automatically

positioned me as an 'outsider' in all focus groups. There is a need, therefore, to attend to the shape of the analysis and thesis with respect to the effects of my insider and/or outsider status with the differing participant groups and the overall focus of the research being on younger LGB couples. I exemplify this throughout the thesis by highlighting interactions which resonated with me and including reflective field notes in my analysis.

The possible impact of my similarities to and differences from the participants has substance as it is recognised that similarities can obscure differences, and differences can obscure similarities (Gabb & Singh, 2014). In my reflexive research practice I acknowledged and capitalised upon these similarities/differences wherever possible. In each interview or focus group I was attentive to the diverse dynamics of the interactions. I did not prioritise my own thinking on any one aspect of participant identity and thereby emphasise a priority that may be less significant to the participant. The goal during fieldwork was to build rapport, trust, and a comfortable research environment, which involved identity management for all parties (Tewksbury & Gagne, 1997). This allowed space for attentiveness to 'couple diversity' (Gabb & Fink, 2015) rather than privileging any area of my own identity.

Throughout the course of the TTC study I reflected on the ways in which I may have shaped the process of knowledge production (Fine, 2002). For the purpose of this thesis reflexivity refers to contemplation of the ways in which the researcher may have influenced the research (Yardley, 2008). Merrill and West (2009) state that reflexivity is required to ascertain the effects of our personal contexts in shaping our sensitivities towards the self and others, and in understanding certain aspects of the research. I did this in a number of ways. I kept a research diary to track my progress, thoughts, feelings, and experiences from the start of my PhD. In a personal blog, I wrote about my research and relationships more generally to consolidate my thinking about context and relationship experiences. For fieldwork with the LGB couples field notes were completed after each interview stage, and these were vital for recording reflections on interactions, couple

dynamics and data that may have been lost in transcription. I wrote a methodological paper on conducting the focus groups with the relationship support counsellors. This drew my attention to subtle differences in the tones of the focus groups and the ways in which I, as the moderator, affected data collection and analysis (Pearson & Vossler, submitted). These activities served as a method for increasing reflexive awareness, helping me examine my own assumptions, values, and beliefs (Holland, 1999; Morrow, 2006) and ensuring I remained sensitive to the socio-cultural, biographical, and temporal contexts of the participants (Yardley, 2000). Therefore, the effect of my reflexive standpoint and the reflexive activities I engaged in throughout the TTC study are essential to this thesis.

In the final section of this chapter I turn my attention to the thesis itself.

1.7 Thesis Outline

This introduction has demarcated the relevant literature and how it has addressed younger LGB couples in long-term relationships. This rich vein of work has provided a backdrop for the research objectives and the formulation of research questions. In the remainder of this chapter, the structure of the thesis is outlined.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review. The chapter explores research into long-term relationships before outlining areas of relationship practice relevant for younger LGB couples. These include research on legal recognition (Riggle, Rostosky & Horne, 2010; Shipman & Smart, 2007) and LGB parenting, children and family planning (Donovan & Wilson, 2008; Gabb, 2005a; Nordqvist, 2012), and the home and division of labour (Carrington, 1999; Dunne, 1999; Gorman Murray, 2006, 2008a; Oerton, 1997). Conceptualisations and transformations of intimacy (Gabb, 2010a; Giddens, 1992; Jamieson, 1998) are discussed with respect to three different forms of intimacy: emotional, physical, and sexual (Duncombe & Marsden, 1995; Mackey et al., 1997), followed by research on love (Barker, 2013; Graham, 2011; Hatfield, Bensman & Rapson, 2012).

The final section focusing on relationship practice is about relationship rules, where ideas and debates surrounding monogamy, non-monogamy, and infidelity are explored (Barker, 2011; McLean, 2004; Vossler & Moller, 2014). Following this, the wider community affiliations of LGB couples are examined through looking at negative experiences relating to identifying as LGB, including marginalisation, discrimination, and homophobia (Clarke et al., 2010; Ellis, 2009) and exploring families, friendship, and community (Weeks et al., 2001; Weston, 1991). The literature on relationship support and LGB couples is considered including the experiences of both LGB couples (Grove & Blasby, 2009; Grove, Peel & Owen-Pugh, 2013) and relationship counsellors (Grove, 2009; Spitalnick & McNair, 2005). An absence of explicit focus in the literature on time and space in relationships is outlined, leading to a conclusion focused on how the TTC study is informed by and can build upon the literature and gaps identified.

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology of the TTC study. The research design is demarcated, and information is provided on the methodological approach with the two participant groups (younger LGB couples and relationship counsellors), including participant demographic information, recruitment strategy, and the methods. Thereafter data analysis and the ethical considerations undertaken in the research are discussed. The following four chapters present the analysis of the data, focusing on time, space, and intimacy respectively.

In Chapter 4, an overview of the analysis is presented before the topic of time and temporality is introduced, with particular focus on the present and the past. I introduce my notion of the 'relational present' as the orienting position within which couples experience their relationships, arguing that this concept is the analytical lens through which relationship experiences can be understood. The chapter presents data on the 'presents' of the younger LGB couple participants, exploring how they negotiate their everyday lives and use time as a resource which supports relationship experiences. This chapter explores how time is a resource for relationship work, for connection and for personal autonomy. The impact of the past is delineated through the

impression it can have on the present, particularly concerning conflict management and resolution. It demonstrates how previous occurrences of conflicts, past relationships, and personal experiences are used as 'biographical anchors', enabling couples to cultivate relationship boundaries and scripts to sustain their relationships (Heaphy et al., 2013).

Chapter 5 examines how participants engaged with the future. This chapter explores definitions and conceptualisations of 'long-term' and 'happy' relationships through considering notions of relationship longevity. It proceeds to discuss the future aspirations couples desired for their relationships including marriage and family planning. In the marriage section, the meanings of marriage and the formalisation of relationships are investigated, building upon the findings of Heaphy et al. (2013) in considering participant accounts of the ordinariness of their relationships. In the family planning section, the ways in which couples spoke about starting a family and having children are presented including methods and options for having children, and the significance of pets and animals within definitions and meanings of the family.

The focus of Chapter 6 is space. The ways in which younger LGB couples utilise and navigate space within their relationships are examined. The first half of the chapter concentrates on the home. The focus here is on how couples defined and/or built their present and future homes, and how the home could represent their couple identities, togetherness, and status as adults, provide a source of stability and safety, and a place to interact with the other people in their lives. This is done in two sections where the home is expressed as a couple space and where it is considered a shared space with others. The second half of the chapter engages with the public/private spaces in which couples are embedded. Relationship support from external relationships such as family and friends, as well as accounts of relationship support from specific services, is examined before experiences of discrimination are explored.

In Chapter 7, analytical attention is brought to how couples conceptualised intimacy and the intersections between emotional, physical, and sexual intimacy. In the emotional intimacy section, participants talk of couple dynamics and relational fit (Mackey et al., 1997) is analysed. I introduce my concept of 'separate togetherness' to outline how participants are maintaining personal autonomy whilst cultivating their couple identity. Hereafter, intimate closeness is discussed through the concept of deep knowing (Jamieson, 1998), and partner support investigated through the notion of the 'couple team'. Concentration then shifts to how physical affection can bridge emotional and sexual intimacy. In the sexual intimacy section, participant experiences and meanings of sexual intimacy and the ways in which sex opened up talk on relationship rules are illuminated. The chapter concludes by examining the interconnections of 'intimate practices', with food and laughter explored as examples of such practices.

The thesis concludes in Chapter 8 by situating the TTC study within the context of previous literature through outlining how the research questions have addressed literature gaps. This is followed by acknowledging the key contributions and findings of the research surrounding four areas: the experiences of the age cohort, the importance of reciprocity, available relationship resources, and inferences about gender. Future directions for my research are presented including how different research questions would enable extension of the study findings, how I intend to focus more in-depth on certain areas of the data such as future aspirations and relationship resources, and how the TTC study provides a foundation for other research into relationships. I offer some personal reflections on the research before providing some concluding remarks.

Chapter 2 : Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature relevant for the TTC study. Previous theorising and research on relationships and LGB couples is introduced. It begins by identifying significant relationship research in the social sciences which frames the importance of attending to the diverse relationship practices of younger LGB couples. Recent research on relationship and couple practices is discussed (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Heaphy et al., 2013; Weeks et al., 2001). The chapter then examines the relationship dynamics of LGB couples by drawing on research on the behaviour and dynamics of LGB couples in general (Clarke et al., 2010; Mackey et al., 2000) before focusing on areas that can affect relationship practices such as legal recognition (Heaphy et al., 2013; Riggle et al., 2010; Shipman & Smart, 2007), parenting/children (Donovan & Wilson, 2008; Gabb, 2005a), the home (Gorman-Murray, 2006, 2008a) and the division of labour (Carrington, 1999; Kurdek, 2007), conceptualisations and transformations of intimacy (Gabb, 2010a; Giddens, 1992; Jamieson, 1998), love (Barker, 2013; Graham, 2011), and relationship rules including monogamy, non-monogamy, and infidelity (Barker, 2011; McLean, 2004).

Following this, the wider communities of LGB couples are reviewed through exploring negative experiences relating to identifying as LGB including marginalisation, discrimination, and homophobia (Clarke et al., 2010; Ellis, 2009) and other relationships including families of choice, families of origin and friendship (Weeks et al., 2001; Weston, 1991). Relationship support is then considered. This includes the role of partners, family, and friends as support, and the literature on LGB individuals and couple counselling and therapy. Finally, the implications of time and space for relationships are outlined. The chapter concludes by critically discussing how the research is informed by and can build upon the literature identified and the gaps outlined. Throughout the chapter I attend to the intersections of age, gender, and relationships and their subsequent implications for the TTC study.

2.2 Long-Term Relationships

Long-term relationships have been at the centre of many psychological and sociological studies over the past few decades (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Gabb & Fink, 2015; Heaphy et al., 2013; Mackey et al., 1997; Mansfield & Collard, 1988; Weeks et al., 2001). Investigating differing patterns of intimate life allows for interrogation of how perception and everyday experiences of long-term relationships are socio-culturally and temporally located. This is particularly relevant when viewing the rich, elaborate, and painful history of LGB individuals (Weeks et al., 2001). To explore the research questions of the TTC study, it is imperative to trace the history of attention directed at LGB long-term relationships. This section outlines previous research on long-term relationships, moving from ideas of discrimination, validation, and recognition of LGB relationships through to how recent research emphasises analysis of relationship practices rather than privileging emphasis on any specific area of identity.

Much research on LGB individuals has emphasised identity, coming out narratives, and the discrimination and marginalisation faced by LGB couples and individuals (Weeks et al., 2001). In their comprehensive '*American Couples*' research comprising 5000 questionnaires completed by individuals and interviews with over 300 couples (including 90 gay and 90 lesbian couples), Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) demonstrated how lesbian and gay couples could maintain long-term relationships despite widely held stereotypes of shorter or less stable relationships. Additional relationship research, interviewing 36 gay and lesbian couples who had been together for more than 15 years, aimed to promote understanding of gay and lesbian couple relationships in order to challenge stereotypes, oppression, and discrimination (Mackey et al., 1997). However, this research is based in the US, is now decidedly outdated, and bisexual identities were noticeably absent, exhibiting the dominance of lesbian/gay experiences in the literature (Barker, 2008).

Many relationship studies in the UK have been influenced by the changing culture of the 'family' including rising divorce rates, the 'crisis of the family', and increasing diversity of relationship formations (Smart, 2007; Weeks et al., 2001). As a result, over the years a sizeable amount of relationship research has compared LGB couples to heterosexuals (Clarke et al., 2010). LGB relationships have been shown to display similar dynamics to heterosexual relationships in areas such as intimacy and parenting/adoption and also exhibit the same positive indicators of lasting relationships (Mackey, et al., 2000). LGB couples benefit when partners are similar in background, attitudes, and values, comparable to heterosexuals (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007), and often poor relationship qualities are linked to the same characteristics as heterosexual couples such as spending too much time apart and infidelity (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Despite similarities in relationship experience, Martell and Prince (2005) note LGB couples design their relationships differently resulting in greater variability. Heaphy et al. (2004) postulated that people in non-heterosexual relationships construct their own relationships where they have the flexibility to create their own rules around monogamy. There are also contrasts relating to how LGB couples meet, with couples often meeting online (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Ross, 2005) through apps like Grindr, and in designated queer spaces (Bell & Binnie, 2004; Bettani, 2014). There are also different dynamics in relation to income and division of labour (Dunne, 1997). These differences have been theorised to be due to the lack of heterosexual 'scripts' to follow and the destabilising of gender roles which may dictate relationship behaviours (Giddens, 1992), something discussed in more depth later.

Highlighting the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy serves to reinforce a binary of sexual identity, and arguably ignores the variation of experiences within and across lesbian, gay, and bisexual couples with respect to many relationship issues (Savin-Williams, 1996). Other research has looked at the differing ways LGB individuals and couples have remade 'family' and 'kin', and engaged in creative practices of relating through 'friends as family' (Weeks et al., 2001; Weston, 1991). This research has drawn on the notable changes in the socio-cultural and temporal

contexts of experience by examining the 'intimate turn' in society (Smart, 2007). Giddens' (1992) 'transformation of intimacy' posits that the ability to redefine relationships and move away from more traditional notions of the 'family' is possible because of a more individualised society (Smart, 2007). Together with regarding the changing socio-cultural context of the acceptance and visibility of LGB individuals, the work of Weeks et al. (2001) in their study on same-sex intimacies (interviewing 96 LGB participants) demonstrated how LGB individuals were maintaining relationships with both families of origin and families of choice. This began to illuminate the ways in which multifaceted patterns of relating were developing among LGB couples who were engaging in 'life experiments' in relation to how they lived and created their relationships and communities.

Recent qualitative interview research conducted by Heaphy et al. (2013; see Chapter 3 for a discussion of the methodology) examining civil partnerships has furthered these complexities. Findings typified the ways in which younger LGB couples are emphasising the ordinariness of their relationships. This was postulated to be due to generational differences, with their younger sample having experienced much less discrimination and increased visibility in their lives because of the zeitgeist in the UK. Rather than attributing this to LGB couples becoming more like heterosexual couples, Heaphy et al. (2013) speculated that heterosexual couples may be becoming more like LGB couples, with more options for relating and forming relationships and less scripts of convention to follow. With increased opportunities and diversity of experiences within long-term relationships there is a need to avoid privileging one demographic factor. For example, sexual orientation may not be the defining factor in stories of LGB relationships (Heaphy et al., 2013).

LGB couples were included in the *Enduring Love? project*, which critically examined gender, generation, and parenthood (see Chapter 3 for more information). Findings from quantitative survey data indicated LGB couples were happier in their relationships, particularly childless

couples (Gabb, Klett-Davies, Fink, & Thomae, 2013). Other findings from qualitative data suggest LGB couples were markedly similar in experiences to the rest of the sample with respect to many relationship dimensions including relationship work, ideas and meanings of sex, and impact of parenthood (Gabb & Fink, 2015). Experiences diverged around non-monogamy and in how LGB couples displayed their relationships. The main point however, is the authors' assertion of the importance of attending to 'couple diversity', referring to the variety of experiences within and between relationships and households. This is particularly pertinent when exploring the 'practices' couples develop in their ways of 'doing' relationships. This is an important aspect of the approach of the TTC study. The next section briefly outlines the definition of relationship practices before focusing on areas of relationship practices relevant for the TTC study.

2.3 Relationship Practices

The concept of relationship practices refers to the things couples 'do' in their relationships and how they relate to each other (Gabb & Fink, 2015). The practices serve to inform interactions between partners which further informs the 'scripts' couples develop over time (Heaphy et al., 2013). The relationship practices are embedded in everyday relationship experiences and, I argue, they are an influential resource for couples in understanding, supporting, and sustaining their relationships. Exploring relationship practices alongside the biographical, socio-cultural and temporal contexts of relationship experiences enables situated understanding of the trials, tribulations, and celebrations of the younger LGB couples in the TTC study, thus allowing for discussion of the considerable diversity of the practices couples develop. This section discusses the literature which frames these varying practices within LGB couples relationships, beginning with the effect of legal recognition on relationships.

2.3.1 Legal Recognition

Legal recognition of LGB relationships has transformed in the UK in recent years with the introduction of civil partnerships and same-sex marriage (see Chapter 1). Prior to this there were

extensive debates about same-sex marriage in the literature (Clarke & Finlay, 2004) and in the wider public arena. These debates largely stemmed from the different meanings and definitions associated with civil partnership and marriage, and were often entwined with religious bodies, and discourses about the 'sanctity of marriage' and how same-sex marriage would be 'detrimental to society' (Bachmann, 2011; Shipman & Smart, 2007). There were also numerous arguments for and against same-sex marriage especially from within academic, journalist, political, and legal circles (Goodwin & Butler, 2009).

Prior to its inception, there were several views on why same-sex marriage should be legalised. Some scholars believed denying LGB couples the legal entry into marriage suggested they were not 'fit' for marriage and therefore that LGB relationships are less important (Sullivan, 1995), including Kitzinger and Wilkinson (2004) who believed that civil partnerships are a lesser form of marriage. Herek (2009) believed the quasi-marital status of civilly partnered couples was preventing them from being seen as 'normal'. Another school of thought was that same-sex marriage would be positive as it would free couples of the symbolic sexism present in the 'institution of marriage' and could de-traditionalise gender roles and norms within it (Stoddard, 1997).

Arguments against same-sex marriage largely drew from feminist, gay, and queer liberation theorising where same-sex marriage would be conforming to heterosexual standards and devalue the distinctiveness of LGB relationships (Clarke & Finlay, 2004). Academics believed it would only privilege the married LGB couple over other types of relationship outside of the 'marital norm' (Stychin, 2003), leading to categorisation of the acceptable and the unacceptable homosexual (Goodwin & Butler, 2009). Many theorists agreed, positing it would marginalise non-monogamous couples (Klesse, 2006), and trans and intersex individuals (Clarke et al., 2010). In line with this reasoning, civil partnerships were seen as positive where LGB individuals have the opportunity to carve out their own constructions of citizenship (Harding, 2008).

Lewin (2001) believed a middle ground existed where ceremonies could conform on wider values but incorporate messages of queerness at vital points. This fit with notions of LGB couples practising greater creativity within their relationships (Weeks et al., 2001). However, Walters (2001) argues that the debate surrounding legal recognition of LGB relationships ignores the personal decisions of lay people, and this is reiterated in research studies. For example, Harding and Peel (2006) found that 94.5% of LGB couples in an international survey of 1500 wanted to be able to marry just like heterosexuals. Everyday reasons for marriage cited in interviews with LGB couples included love, mutual responsibilities, family recognition, legal recognition, and a public statement of commitment (Shipman & Smart, 2007). These attitudes align with the evolving meaning of marriage within society, which has moved away from marriage as an economic contract and towards companionate relationships (Smart, 2007).

These debates contextualise the potential conflicting meanings of and attitudes towards civil partnership and marriage for the LGB community. They demonstrate how legal recognition is entwined with social recognition of LGB relationships and political beliefs, and can have positive effects (Heaphy et al., 2013; Thomas, 2014). Results from an online survey of LGB individuals have shown that the positive effects of legal recognition include increased well-being and less psychological stress (Riggle et al., 2010). In-depth interviews with nine LGB individuals found civil partnerships encouraged more open identity and better relationships with family (Goodwin & Butler, 2009). Interview research by Heaphy et al. (2013) and Thomas (2014) found civil partnerships facilitated feelings of normalisation, ordinariness, and inclusion among LGB couples. Notwithstanding this, the positive impact of legal recognition needs to be heeded with some caution. Goodwin and Butler (2009) showed that some couples felt they occupied an uncertain position within society due to confusion about what language to use. This could indicate that same-sex marriage will be more positive for LGB couples as it allows them to feel comfortable with using terminology reserved for marriage. This is already the case with a large number of LGB

couples in civil partnerships, whereby they use language such as marriage, wedding, husband, and wife (Bachmann, 2011; Heaphy et al., 2013; Thomas, 2014), especially to convey the importance of their relationship to other people (Goodwin & Butler, 2009).

Thomas (2014) signified how positive discourses of triumph surrounding same-sex marriage and civil partnership were often experienced concurrently with atrocity stories of apprehension, marginalisation, and inequality. For example, some participants talked of negative reactions from parents and loved ones. Heaphy et al. (2013) acknowledged the complex landscape of LGB couple relationship experiences where, despite legal recognition, there were still instances of invalidation such as parents not attending civil partnership ceremonies, and thus, couples could not live 'fully ordinary lives'. This illuminates the fact that LGB individuals and couples still face challenges despite increased socio-cultural and legal recognition (discussed later in the chapter). Further socio-cultural effects of legal recognition can be seen through looking at recent statistics surrounding age, gender, and sexual orientation.

Research shows the average age for both first marriage and having a child is increasing, with individuals concentrating on careers before settling down (ONS, 2011; Walker et al., 2010). This is particularly the case for heterosexual couples with the average age of marriage for women being 34 and for men, 36.5. Figures show LGB couples in civil partnerships and same-sex marriages tend to be older than their opposite sex counterparts (ONS, 2014c; Ross et al., 2011). This suggests there are complex interactions with demographic factors such as sexual orientation, age, and gender. There is a downward trend in the average age of first marriage among LGB couples and increasing numbers of younger LGB couples getting married. Figures shows 35% of gay men and 42% of lesbians in civil partnership ceremonies conducted in 2010 were under 35 (Ross et al., 2011) which rose to 40% of gay men and 46% of lesbians in 2012 (ONS, 2012). For same-sex marriage (March – June 2014), 40% of gay men and 48% of lesbians were under 35, with the largest number of men and women marrying aged 30-34 (ONS, 2014a). These average age figures

of civil partnership have decreased year by year. Recent figures for same-sex marriage show the average age of female partners is now 37 and for male partners is 38.6, both of which have decreased compared to the most recent civil partnership figures (ONS, 2014a).

The downward trend in age for LGB couples may be due to the increased incidence of older couples becoming civilly partnered when the legislation was first introduced (ONS, 2012). It may be indicative of younger generations of LGB couples remaking tradition and seeing their lives and relationships as 'ordinary' in response to increasing opportunities and access to civil rights and relational citizenship (Heaphy et al., 2013). As a result, they may be less inclined to reject marriage as a heterosexual institution. The impact of same-sex marriage remains to be seen. The timeliness of the TTC study is evidenced in that it offers an opportunity to explore how younger LGB couples negotiate decisions surrounding civil partnership/marriage and the value couples place on it within their long-term relationships. This is especially important to consider alongside the implications of age, gender, and sexual orientation, and the potential positive effects and negative experiences associated with legal recognition.

Another area which has been steeped in debate and has seen attitudinal and socio-legal changes is LGB parenthood.

2.3.2 LGB Parenting and Family Planning

The subject and experiences of LGB parenthood and family planning have changed dramatically since the 1970s (Weeks et al., 2001). This is bound to changing socio-cultural and temporal contexts where new stories of opportunities and choice have developed for LGB couples (Clarke et al., 2010; Weeks et al., 2001). This section highlights changes in LGB parenting over the last few decades and the literature on LGB parenthood. Throughout, the impact of gender and other relevant aspects of identity are underlined.

For LGB couples there are a variety of options available for parenthood (Heaphy et al., 2013). Weeks et al. (2001) discuss the different stories associated with LGB parenthood, where LGB couples were talking of older (or past) stories of impossibilities and difficulties relating to LGB parenthood together with newer stories of increased opportunities and choices surrounding having children. Many, particularly older, LGB individuals and couples were becoming parents through heterosexual relationships (Tasker & Patterson, 2007). These stories were of difficulty and discrimination based on sexual orientation if LGB parents were living with open sexual identities (Weeks et al., 2001). However, many LGB parents were successfully arranging co-parenting agreements with ex-partners or friendship networks (Donovan & Wilson, 2008; Weeks et al., 2001). Nowadays, a multitude of options exist including donor insemination, IVF, adoption, or fostering for female couples, and surrogacy or adoption/fostering for male couples (Heaphy et al., 2013; Nordqvist, 2012; Weeks et al., 2001).

Unsurprisingly, there are differences in patterns of how male and female couples talk and think about becoming parents. Heaphy et al. (2013) found that male couples were more tentative when talking about becoming parents due to the associated problems that surrogacy or adoption/fostering represented. In comparison, the female couples in their research perceived of becoming parents more readily and had a stronger desire to have children. This might represent gender differences in how motherhood and fatherhood are thought about and experienced for LGB couples, which are tied to socio-cultural notions of gender. Sara Ruddick's (1989) work posits that 'mothering' is a practice governed by maternal thinking. This thinking is characterised by three demands: preservation, growth, and social acceptance (O'Reilly, 2009) and is affected by maternal virtues. Humility enables 'mothers' to acknowledge the limits of their control in relation to preserving children, cheerfulness maintains a belief in being able to keep children safe, and education nurtures a child's development (Rumsey, 1990). Although the concept focuses heavily on women, it can be applied to anyone engaging in 'mothering' as a practice (O'Reilly, 2009). Not all those who 'mother' are women (Cuneen, 1989), and this notion can be applied to fathers, and

therefore gay male couples, as well. Ruddick also pointed towards the importance of including men in childcare narratives (Doucet & Lee, 2014), and indeed, there is a burgeoning literature on fatherhood (Doucet, 2006). Research on gay fatherhood demonstrates that young gay men describe it as a natural desire stemming from a wish to continue the loving and caring environment they grew up with (Langdridge, 2013). This complicates the effects of gender on ideas of motherhood and fatherhood which might be key factors to consider in relation to the family planning narratives of LGB couples.

Although parenthood is an option for LGB couples, it is not without problems. Some obstacles are gender-dependent due to the varying contexts of possibilities for male and female couples. For female couples, there can be complications with donor conception or IVF including differences in opinion on sperm donors (O'Neill, Hamer & Dixon, 2012), difficulty trying to match race or other desired characteristics (Nordqvist, 2011), using a known or unknown donor (Heaphy et al., 2013; Nordqvist, 2012, 2014) and concerns about the high cost of using fertility clinics (Nordqvist, 2012; Weeks et al., 2001). Other tensions exist concerning the production of or reluctance to assume gender and motherhood roles, and around distinguishing between biological and 'other' parents where female couples might not be seen as equal mothers (Gabb, 2005a; Goldberg, Kashy & Smith, 2012). For male couples, there is less research (Langdridge, 2013), but the research that does exist has shown how management of co-parenting agreements can be complex and that surrogacy is difficult or a remote possibility (Heaphy et al., 2013). In qualitative interview research with young gay and bisexual men, Langdridge (2013) evidenced how most participants thought fatherhood was an option for the future. Many LGB couples contemplate adoption or fostering which is often seen as an ethical choice (Heaphy et al., 2013). Adoption however, can be a long and painful process (Weeks et al., 2001). Despite the obstacles, many couples envision and actively plan for parenthood, and successfully become parents (Heaphy et al., 2013; Nordqvist, 2012, 2014; Weeks et al., 2001).

Research on LGB parenthood suggests LGB parents are highly invested in parenting due to the process of decision making which is conscious and requires substantial planning, time, and effort (Donovan & Wilson, 2008; Goldberg, Downing & Moyer, 2012). Parenting also impacts on the couple relationship including facing prejudice (Patterson, 2008), increasing primary relationship commitment but decreasing time and energy for relationship maintenance (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Heubner, Mandic, Mackaronis, Beoghner, & Hoff, 2012), and issues surrounding heteronormativity (O'Neill et al., 2012). LGB parents are, however, more likely to exhibit couple harmony and satisfaction with partner as a co-parent (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002).

Research has also focused on the children of LGB parents. Common stereotypes persist surrounding the children of LGB parents where it is assumed that they may be more likely to experience confusion regarding their sexuality or gender, to be homosexual, and to get bullied at school (Clarke et al., 2010; Morse, McLaren & McLachlan, 2007). Alongside these stereotypes, talks show analysis show that it is viewed as sinful, unnatural, and selfish; ignores the child's best interests; and denies children appropriate role models (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2004). It is suggested that the prejudice faced by LGB parents and families results in a high quality level of parenting (Johnson, 2012). Fitzgerald (2010) discussed the unique issues that children of LGB couples or 'queerspawn' face, including defending their parents from homophobic comments and dealing with the coming out of their parent, but also notes that many issues are the product of attitudes towards and responses to sexual identity rather than resulting from the parent/child relationship.

Thus, the logistical decisions relating to becoming parents, the consequences for children, the interactions with gender and sexual orientation, and socio-cultural and temporal contextual factors are imperative considerations when reflecting upon family planning within LGB relationships. As mentioned, the age of having children is increasing where individuals are concentrating on careers before settling down (ONS, 2011; Walker et al., 2010). Similarly, Heaphy et al. (2013) noted how younger couples in their sample were locating and experiencing their

relationships through life stages or transitions where parenthood signalled 'settling down'. This has ramifications for the parenting and family planning of younger LGB couples within the TTC study. The effect of age is vital to decisions around parenthood and family planning, together with thoughts on imagined experiences of parenthood and the impact on children, especially as none of the couples in the TTC study currently had children. Likewise, the intersections of time and space are crucial to acknowledge with respect to LGB parenthood. Attending to negotiation of everyday spaces such as the home and school, and managing different (sometimes conflicting) identities (Gabb, 2005b) is paramount. The home in particular is seen as a place of significance, both for couple relationships and for the 'family'. For many couples, buying a home is also seen as a life stage or transition, and the experience, meaning, and negotiation of space in the home plays a major role in relationship practices. Therefore, the next section focuses on the home and the division of labour within LGB relationships.

2.3.3 The Home and Division of Labour

In the literature, the home is seen as pivotal for building couple closeness, identity, and nurturing relationships (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Gorman-Murray, 2006). It is also tied to everyday experiences of space (Gorman-Murray, 2008a; Johnson, 2000) which can situate LGB couple relationship experiences, practices, ideals, and imaginings (for example marriage, family).

The 'home' has often been associated with the heterosexual, nuclear family in social science research (Gorman-Murray, 2006; Weeks et al., 2001) and a prominent focus has been on the material aspects of housing, location, and possessions (Smart, 2007). However, it has more recently been recognised that the home is more complex, and as a result, there is a need to adopt a more rounded view which appraises the temporal, spatial, ideological, emotional, and material factors relating to the home (Smart, 2007). A home can be a place of shelter or residence, an ideological construct, associated with a particular time, particular relationships, or a frame of mind (Mallett, 2004; Smart, 2007) and is not always a haven to its inhabitants (Gorman-Murray,

2008a). The home has been theorised as a place of belonging, community, oppression, and marginalisation (Weeks et al., 2001) which is not always manifested as a physical residence.

Studies on the home have explored many areas including emotional geographies around gender and family, parenting, eating practices, and leisure habits (Davidson & Milligan, 2004), the effect of domestic violence (Cribb 1999), and how the home is important for intimacy (Gabb, 2010a; Gabb & Fink, 2015; Gorman-Murray, 2008a). Other work has acknowledged the intersections of time and space within the home such as overlaps between home and work life (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Valentine & Hughes, 2012), and the division of domestic labour for couples (Carrington, 1999; Dryden, 1999). Valentine and Hughes (2012) discussed how the home was becoming an increasingly specialised space with many different uses for the individuals who inhabit it, including spaces (and time) for personal and family use. Research into LGB individuals and the home has denoted how the home can be both a sanctuary and a place of negative experiences (Gorman-Murray, 2008a; Weeks et al., 2001).

Early research on LGB individuals outlined how experiences of the home and residential spaces tend to be of a heterosexualised space (Egerton, 1990; Valentine, 1993; Valentine, Skelton & Butler, 2003), and this is particularly the case when evaluating the connotations of the family within the home (Valentine, 1993). The home could be associated with concealing sexual identity (Valentine et al., 2003), can embody an ideal that LGB individuals and couples do not adhere to (Valentine, 1993), and can therefore be alienating (Gorman-Murray, 2006, 2008a). Conversely, the home can be a private space where LGB individuals and couples have the freedom to be intimate and enact non-heterosexual identities away from more threatening or risky (heterosexualised) public spaces (Davidson & Milligan, 2004; Gorman-Murray, 2008a). Homes are a primary site in which identities are established and cultivated (Gorman-Murray, 2008a; Weeks et al., 2001). Weeks et al. (2001) focused on how the first home for non-heterosexuals could be associated with childhood and familial experiences (positive and/or negative) whilst moving out

can be attached to escaping oppressive attitudes and shame, coming out, attending university, and increased independence. In research using interviews with cohabiting LGB couples, Gorman-Murray (2006, 2008a) found shared homes among LGB couples could be a site for individual and couple identity development whereby 'homemaking' enabled the development of a sense of self (Gorman-Murray, 2006; Noble, 2004). Homemaking therefore illuminates a facet of identity work whereby individuals can continually remake their homes to reflect changing identities (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). Thus, the meaning of the home is not fixed, but tied to memory, relationships, or events, and the importance of it changes over and across time and with the individuals who inhabit it (Smart, 2007). Adopting this view enables meanings of the home to be interrogated, and accepted as multiple and dependent on the individual(s) 'making' the home (Mallett, 2004).

The home and the everyday practices occurring within it often require negotiation (Weeks et al, 2001). The division of labour is a prominent aspect of these everyday practices, with extensive research having been carried out with LGB couples. It appears LGB couples may be more equal than heterosexuals in terms of the division of labour due to a lack of traditional gender roles (Clarke et al., 2010; Jamieson, 1998; Weeks et al., 2001). Research indicates gay men tend to specialise in particular household tasks (for example, one does the cooking, the other washes up) whereas lesbians tend to do the same tasks equally often (Kurdek, 2007). Longitudinal ethnographic research with LGB couples by Carrington (1999) lead to criticism of the notion of equality in LGB couples, stating that there is a self-presentation of equality in interviews similar to that where heterosexual couples downplay inequalities (Dryden, 1999; Jamieson, 1998). Carrington (1999) found that with many couples one individual did more, with other research finding that in general gay men tended to take the credit and lesbians tended to give the credit to their partner (Clarke et al., 2010). Dunne (1999) posited that gender is still pertinent, although LGB couples 'do' gender differently in different contexts compared to heterosexuals. This suggests there are complex intersections between gender, sexual orientation, and the division of labour

(Oerton, 1997; Weeks et al., 2001) especially when considering links to finances and power within LGB relationships.

Research shows that power plays a central role in terms of income especially for gay men, with the higher earner holding more power (Jamieson, 1998). This has implications for ideas around the 'breadwinner' and the division of labour. Some LGB couples express traditional understandings, with the person with less power doing more housework (Weeks et al., 2001). In an extensive literature review of division of labour research, Oerton (1997) acknowledged gender differences between couples, with gay men more likely to divide domestic labour more equally where there was more parity in income and a shorter time cohabitating. Lesbian couples displayed inequalities in tasks which were particularly disliked or 'nasty' (Coleman & Walters, 1989, cited in Oerton, 1997) and were flexible and interchangeable in their division of labour, viewing it as a shared responsibility (Peace, 1993, cited in Oerton, 1997). This demonstrates how gender can still impact LGB relationships (Dunne, 1999; Oerton, 1997) and can have differing effects. The most important point to heed is that it seems division of labour and the various intersections of everyday life needs continual co-operation and that this differs for each couple (Oerton, 1997; Weeks et al., 2001). It remains an essential aspect of the relationship work couples engage in (Gabb & Fink, 2015), such that there is a need to attend to the complexity of experiences and the changing relational and individual contexts of couples. Another area which is important to consider is intimacy.

2.3.4 Intimacy

Theorising of intimacy has been included in a range of research in the social sciences including that relating to the family (Gabb, 2010a; Jamieson, 1998), long-term relationships (Duncombe & Marsden, 1995; Gabb & Fink, 2015), LGB couples (Heaphy et al., 2013; Weeks et al., 2001), and the transformation of intimacy (Giddens, 1992; Jamieson, 1998). The general conception is that intimacy is a broad notion which conveys the connectedness of individuals on a variety of levels

including emotionally, physically, and sexually; through verbal and non-verbal communication; and levels of closeness, trust, and commitment. Intimate practices are the things that people do to 'enable, generate and sustain a subjective sense of closeness and being attuned and special to each other' (Jamieson, 2011, p. 1). This section discusses conceptualisations of intimacy, practices of intimacy, emotion work, communication, and sexual intimacy relevant for LGB couple relationship experiences. Throughout, the effects of age, gender, and time are illuminated.

Early studies and theorising on intimacy largely paired intimacy with heterosexuality and sexual relationships (Gabb, 2010a) but intimacy is now regarded outside of this remit and agreed to be much more than (hetero) sexuality, including mutual disclosure of feelings (Gabb, 2010a; Giddens, 1992; Jamieson, 1998). Conceptualisations of intimacy now largely draw on the 'transformation of intimacy' (Giddens, 1992), which refers to the shift in society away from traditional notions of intimacy, relationships, and families leading to more acceptance of diversity regarding sexual identity and family formation (Weeks et al., 2001). Giddens (1992) asserts that this transformation of intimacy increases the likelihood of couples achieving the 'pure relationship' where there can be equality, mutual disclosure, and closeness. This notion has been criticised for marginalising class, gender, and ethnic dimensions, and family and parental life, through assuming all individuals have equal access to resources (Gabb, 2010a; Jamieson, 1998). It is postulated that LGB couples may be more likely to achieve, and actively strive towards, the 'egalitarian ideal' due to the lack of those gender differences which are present in heterosexual couples (Giddens, 1992; Weeks et al., 2001). Nonetheless, research suggests gender might lead to potential differences in intimacy between male and female couples.

Interview research from LGB couples in long-term relationships suggests lesbians score higher than gay men in psychological (emotional) intimacy and gay men higher in sexual intimacy (Mackey et al., 1997). It has been reported that lesbians have a stronger interpersonal focus in their relationships and can recover more easily from negative interactions than heterosexuals and

gay men (Burch, 2008). Weinstock (2004) describes the effect of gender differences on female LGB relationships positing that both individuals are more likely to be relationally oriented and less personally autonomous, thus contributing to the potential for 'fusion'. 'Fusion' refers to a loss of individuality within the couple (Savin-Williams, 1996). Male couples are often reported to be more independent and less relationally oriented (Mackey et al., 1997). This may arise from gender differences in socialisation where women are expected to be more emotional and caring for other people while men are socialised to be more autonomous and deny their feelings (Holm, Werner-Wilson, Cook, & Berger, 2001).

The findings on LGB couples may, however, represent generalisations about LGB relationships (Burch, 2008). Research indicates that couples value differentiation within connectedness, meaning lesbians still like their individuality and gay men still like to be connected intimately (Weston, 1991), and sometimes gay men are emotionally closer than lesbians (Peplau, Viniegas, & Miller-Campbell, 1996). Kitzinger and Coyle (1995) have criticised many aspects of research into LGB relationships for ignoring the social context or positing heterosexuals as the norm. Notions of 'fusion' have been criticised as 'simplistic, individualistic and a "catch-all" explanation' (p. 66) for diversity problems in lesbian relationships (Kitzinger & Coyle, 1995). Many findings may have been influenced by stereotypes of gender differences and socialisation which might not align with the changing nature of society concerning gender roles, which is occurring through challenges by LGB couples and contemporary relationships (Clarke et al. 2010; Jamieson, 1998; Maxwell, 2007).

The *Inventing Adulthoods* study provides further insight into intimacy for young people where three types of attitudes and experiences related to relationships emerged: fusion, autonomy, and uncommitted (Henderson et al., 2007). Findings challenged gendered notions of love and sex, and stereotypes around sexual identity. For example, some young heterosexual women displayed an uncommitted stance towards relationships and some young gay couples exhibited a fused relationship style. However, there were still stereotypes of emotionally focused heterosexual

women and the 'macho man' among both gay and straight participants (p. 147). The suggestion is that young people's relationship experiences cannot be easily demarcated along lines of gender or sexual identity. Changes over time, access to, and opportunities for utilising, resources, and investment in other areas of their lives (for example, career and education) mediated relationship experiences (Henderson et al., 2007). Despite this, notions of gender are still relevant when exploring intimacy, especially with respect to emotion work and communication.

Before discussing the nature of emotion work and communication, it is relevant to distinguish between emotions and feelings, despite the related terms frequently being used interchangeably (Hochschild, 1979). Emotions are perceived as vital to the fabric of human experience (Burkitt, 1997), and are bound by social rules (Hochschild, 1979). They are also seen as socially constructed and as a reaction to certain experiences (Burkitt, 2002; Smart, 2007). Burkitt (1997) describes emotion as a complex which can be embodied and discursively produced. Feelings on the other hand are the experiences associated with particular emotions, and can be the emotional expressions or reactions to particular emotional states which can then be cognitively interpreted (Burkitt, 2012; Smart, 2007). However, feelings are not always conscious, can be hard to communicate, and are sometimes not indicative of emotions. But feelings are connected with thoughts and although sometimes unaware of connection to emotions, individuals can be aware that their feelings are guiding their behaviour (Burkitt, 2002). Thus, emotions can be felt, and feelings can be attributed to emotions. The relationship is multidimensional, with emotions and feelings embedded in the context of lived experiences, and these distinctions are pertinent for emotion work.

Emotion work is a concept which was first theorised by Hochschild (1979). The notion has been applied to relationships and intimacy (Duncombe & Marsden, 1995; Gabb & Fink, 2015) and is deemed an essential part of psychological intimacy and communication, aiding in relationship maintenance. It refers to the efforts made to enhance emotional well-being and provide

emotional support in a relationship (Holm et al., 2001). Researchers argue emotion work is 'gendered', with women bearing the burden of the emotion work within heterosexual relationships (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Hochschild, 1979). Findings from quantitative research with heterosexual couples indicate that when emotion work is equal, relationship satisfaction is higher (Holm et al., 2001). Interviews with LGB couples have shown that emotional equality is more important than equal division of household tasks, especially to women (Mackey et al., 1997), thus indicating the significance of emotional intimacy in relationships. Linked to emotion work and emotional intimacy then is the role of communication which is seen as a fundamental intimate practice.

Research has stressed the importance of both verbal and non-verbal communication within relationships (Gabb & Fink, 2015). Verbal communication, specifically talking and listening, is central in narratives of mutual disclosure and openness, which is seen to facilitate intimate closeness (Jamieson, 1998) and to enable management of conflict (Mackey et al., 1997; Miller, 2012). Evidence shows that couples engage in reflexive bickering and light-hearted banter which allows management of areas of conflict or disagreement to be faced with humour (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Heaphy et al., 2013), particularly for LGB couples (Grinnell, 2008). 'Good' communication is seen as positive in relationship support discourses (Chang & Barrett, 2009) and a characteristic of a successful relationship (Gabb & Fink, 2015). It is, however, important to attend to information, thoughts, and emotions which are not expressed, such as secrets (Smart, 2007), as the unspoken can cause tension and undermine relationships (Miller, 2012). There is also value in not disclosing everything as this ensures a sense of privacy is retained (Petronio & Durham, 2008). Some research suggests not-talking may occur along gendered boundaries with men displaying higher propensities for non-disclosure (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993), but Gabb and Fink (2015) have demonstrated more complexity. Communication is not always a positive thing and some couples may not disclose certain topics for positive reasons, such as to avoid causing hurt or pain. For example, one male participant spoke of actively not talking about miscarriage to protect a

partner. Thus, the role of non-verbal communication is seen as crucial for relationships (Miller, 2012), with mutual understanding and 'deep knowing' (Jamieson, 1998), along with physical affection, potentially conveying connectedness, love, and care (Gabb, 2010a; Reis, 2014). Physical affection is also seen as an intimate practice which is connected to sexual intimacy.

Sexual intimacy is an integral part of most adult relationships. For LGB couples, socio-cultural understandings associate lesbians with oral sex and gay men with anal sex (Peel, 2005). However, sexual practices do not map easily onto sexual identities as heterosexuals also engage in a variety of sexual acts and many individuals practice activities outside of social norms such as BDSM (Clarke et al., 2010). There is also marked diversity in sexual intimacy within each sexual identity group (Frankis & Flowers, 2005). In terms of frequency of sex, research suggests that heterosexual women have more sex than lesbians, and gay men and heterosexual men have a higher frequency of sex than women (Solomon et al., 2005), with these type of findings supporting notions of 'lesbian bed death', which refers to the low level of sexual activity in lesbian relationships (Munsen & Stelboum, 1999). Such findings have been criticised however. The low levels of sexual activity within lesbian relationships are arguably a consequence of using a heterosexual metric for sexual activity (Frye, 1990), which pathologises lesbian sexual activity rather than recognising the existence of lesbian relationship norms (Kitzinger & Coyle, 1995). This is also echoed by Clarke et al. (2010) in discussing issues surrounding 'promiscuity' in gay men and bisexuals. They argue that using value laden words suggests there is such a thing as 'too much' sex or if comparing everyone to gay men, everyone else would be having 'too little' sex.

There are also implications for sex when looking at patterns over time. Previous research on LGB couple relationships found that sexual intimacy tended to decrease over time, emotional intimacy increased, and physical affection stayed relatively constant (Mackey et al., 1997). Heaphy et al. (2013) described how many of their young LGB couples believed sex was (mostly) seen as important for relationship formation but not viewed as 'essential' for intimacy and closeness as

the relationship progressed (Heaphy et al., 2013, p. 129). This sentiment was partly echoed by Gabb & Fink (2015), who found that although sexual intimacy was a significant aspect of intimacy for couples in their sample, it was not the most important. It was also seen to ebb and flow within relationships, particularly when there were many responsibilities in everyday lives such as work and parenthood.

There are also interesting effects of age on sexual intimacy. Findings suggest sexual intimacy decreases with age (Gabb & Fink, 2015), which aligns with research studies on young people which suggest that sex is viewed as important to relationships (Banker et al., 2010), particularly in the beginning and at younger ages where individuals are exploring their identities (Forrest, 2010; Henderson et al., 2007). Over time the shorter-term, casual sexual relationships of young people turn into longer-term, more serious relationships (Henderson et al., 2007). Sex was also viewed as something that was positive for relationships and could facilitate closeness, particularly for young women (Sharpe & Thomson, 2005). Nonetheless, there are alternative discourses of sex among young people where sex is viewed as just part of relationships and individuals reject gendered notions of sex within relationships (Forrest, 2010; Maxwell, 2007).

Therefore, it is imperative to underline the specific context of each individual's relationship experience and the intimate practices couples develop. The intersections of time, space, and identity are interesting to highlight with respect to intimate practices among LGB couples. The biographical, socio-cultural, and temporal contexts are vital in addressing criticisms of stereotypes of LGB couples in relationships and of gender differences surrounding intimacy. Attention is now directed to the concept of love which is often viewed as an intimate practice which both builds and characterises intimacy (Gabb & Fink, 2015).

2.3.5 Love

Often both explicitly and implicitly associated with intimacy is the concept of love, particularly when appraising the changing meaning of relationships within the socio-cultural and temporal contexts of society (Smart, 2007). Love is seen as the basis for long-term relationships in both academic and everyday discourses of relationships (Heaphy et al., 2013), and there are many different types of love theorised as important in relationship formation and as relationships change over time (Jamieson, 1998; Weeks et al., 2001).

The concept of love can mean different things across many types of relationship (Graham, 2011), and is frequently grouped into discrete categories such as maternal love, romantic love, and compassionate love (Smart, 2007). In relation to long-term relationships, love is often associated with romantic, passionate, companionate, and/or compassionate love (Graham, 2011; Hatfield et al., 2012; Reis, Maniaci, & Rogge, 2014). There have been many research studies attempting to measure love within relationships. For example, Hatfield et al. (2012) compared 33 different scales that measure 'passionate love' and commented on how scales of passionate love have evolved over time to measure attitudes towards and experiences of love. Other research has measured the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural components of love, intimacy, and sexuality within passionate love scales (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986). Several theories of love have been proposed which aim to demarcate the different types of love. For example, Sternberg's (1988, cited in Hatfield et al., 2012) triangular theory of love explains that different types of love are made up of different combinations of three components – intimacy, passion, and commitment.

However, Smart (2007) notes that these different categories of love are fluid and change over time rather than being fixed. Mansfield and Collard (1988) found women and men had different expectations of marriage and relationships, with women being surprised when the intimacy associated with courtship disappeared. Many researchers agree that long-term relationships typically have a high amount of passionate (or romantic) love at the beginning of the relationship

which evolves over time to become companionate love (Graham, 2011). Heaphy et al. (2013) build on Swidler's (2003) notions of mythic and prosaic love, where prosaic love is seen as requiring hard work and commitment while mythic love is associated with idealistic notions of love as fleeting and magical (Heaphy et al., 2003). Moreover, the two types of love can exist together and individuals can switch from discourses of one to the other (Heaphy et al., 2013). Giddens' (1992) concept of 'confluent love' proposes equality in emotional give and take which only develops alongside intimacy. Weeks et al. (2001) build upon Giddens' work by showing how love can be dependent on building intimacy, commitment, and trust.

Thus, love can be viewed in many ways. It is often seen as an ideological requirement for commitment and intimacy in long-term relationships (Heaphy et al., 2013; Smart, 2007; Weeks et al., 2001), as an emotion which is experienced differently by individuals, and as a construct given meaning through socio-cultural and political contexts (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Smart, 2007). Attending to these different conceptions of love is important as it is an underlying socio-cultural driver for intimate relationships. The concept is actually a relatively young ideal for relationships, having arisen in the 19th century when ideas of 'courting' and 'romancing' began to disentangle marriage from wider kinships networks and to give the relationship prominence (Giddens, 1992, p. 25). Nowadays, the socio-cultural imaginary is saturated with rules, ideals, and social norms reinforcing a particular view of love in relationships, with the media in particular acting as a striking source of influence on young people's romantic ideals (Holmes, 2007). Barker (2013), in critiquing these normative ideals, has outlined many rules about love in relationships. These rules included the romantic ideal of meeting a perfect partner, 'the one' or a 'soulmate', who must meet all of an individual's needs; that love conquers all; and that an individual is not enough alone. Adhering to these norms can give rise to unrealistic expectations about relationship experiences resulting in pain when reality does not live up to ideals. Barker (2013) determines that there is a need to be more flexible and to embrace uncertainty around love, viewing people

as plural and liable to change. Viewing love as something that is a process and that can be cultivated can relieve the pressure of the socio-cultural imaginary (Barker, 2013; Holmes, 2007).

Smart (2007) believes the distinctions between types of love ignore its relational basis and that it is seen as something we 'do' and 'feel' rather than a pre-existing emotion. Some researchers have explored acts of compassionate love in the everyday and the role this might play in relationships (Fehr, Harasymchuk, & Sprecher, 2014; Reis et al., 2014). Narratives of providing care and commitment are imperative for the ways in which love might be shown or felt through everyday acts (Jamieson, 1998; Smart, 2007). In this sense, love can be both a requirement for commitment, trust, and intimacy, and vital for building and maintaining relationships through relationship practices.

Heaphy et al. (2013) described how love could provide the basis for commitment in the relationships of LGB couples as well as an underlying motivation for entering into a civil partnership. Shipman and Smart (2007) found that love was a motivator for LGB couples to undertake commitment ceremonies, and that love and commitment were embedded in the everyday practices of relationships. Jamieson (2011) details how relationships which are typically associated with love involve practices of intimacy, whereas expressions of love as a feeling are a practice of intimacy and work to reinforce it. Gabb and Fink (2015) build on Gary Chapman's (2010) *Five Languages of Love*, that is words, time, acts, gifts, and touch, which are viewed as vital ingredients in making a relationship work. Additionally, Gabb and Fink (2015) talk of how affirmations of love and commitment can be indicative of relationship work, including how saying 'I love you' could diffuse tensions, communicate apologies and goodbyes, and convey acceptance. This denotes how contemporary understandings and experiences of love, intimacy, and relationships are embedded in socio-cultural and temporal contexts such as discourses of a therapeutic culture where relationships need work (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Smart, 2007) and how love helps keep relationships together (Barker, 2013).

This section has discussed the complex concept of love and the different, contradictory understandings and meanings of love within relationships. Love is connected to intimacy as a characteristic of and motivation for intimate relationships, and as a practice of intimacy. I have acknowledged how experiences, definitions and meanings of love are shaped by the socio-cultural and temporal contexts in which they are embedded, such as how social norms and rules might affect ideas of romantic love and views of relationships. The next section of this chapter presents the often implicit rules that govern relationship boundaries and practices, which also have the potential to impact practices of intimacy and conceptions of love. Specific attention is afforded to conceptions of monogamy, non-monogamy, and infidelity.

2.3.6 Relationship Rules

For the purposes of the TTC study, relationship rules refer to how couples define their relationship in terms of status, seriousness, and rules regarding acceptable behaviour. These rules may differ depending on the scripts of relating that LGB individuals draw from and the biographical anchors (Heaphy et al., 2013) and relational ideologies (Ringer, 2001) associated with personal experiences. The rules may not be fixed but involve a fluid and shifting negotiation of the boundaries and rules in the relationship. Rules may concern a wide variety of areas including monogamy, sex, love, commitment, and gender (Barker, 2013). These aspects are interwoven, created, and negotiated by individuals and couples on a continual basis, and are developed over time through scripting (Heaphy et al., 2013).

Monogamy is often an implicit assumption within relationships (Emmers-Sommer, Warber & Halford, 2010; Yip, 1997) due to an understanding that it is the norm in couple relationships (Barker, 2013). Research demonstrates that most individuals expect an exclusive monogamous relationship (Sweeney & Horwitz, 2001), but the literature suggests that monogamy is a slippery concept (Barker, 2011; Shernoff, 2006) and individuals often have differing definitions and

understandings of monogamous boundaries (Blow & Hartnett, 2005; Moller & Vossler, 2014). This is evidenced through research findings reporting that 40% of young couples did not know what their partner's monogamy rules were and therefore unknowingly broke them (Warren, Harvey, & Agnew, 2011). Because of this norm, monogamy is often intertwined with infidelity when individuals break the rules which immediately position any activity outside of monogamy as negative (McLean, 2004). Positioning monogamy in this way obscures practices of non-monogamy and suggests there is a right or moral way to behave (McLean, 2004). Barker (2013) believes rules around monogamy need to be questioned, and that couples should not view monogamy/non-monogamy as a binary but instead place themselves on a continuum of monogamy. This includes an emotional dimension and a sexual dimension and is particularly relevant for LGB relationship research.

There is increasing awareness of higher levels of non-monogamy in LGB relationships (Barker & Langdridge, 2010; Haritaworn, Lin & Klesse, 2006). There are perceived stereotypes of gay men and bisexuals as non-monogamous and promiscuous and of lesbians as serial monogamists (Klesse, 2005; Martell & Prince, 2005). However, the results from an online survey of over 170 gay men revealed 73% were monogamous, more than stereotypes suggest (Bricker & Horne, 2007). In a review of empirical literature, Bonello (2009) found that the majority of gay males could successfully maintain monogamous relationships. Hoang, Holloway and Mendoza (2011) also refute the stereotype of all bisexuals as unfaithful, with 34% of bisexual women in their survey sample staying monogamous. They suggest the reasonably high number of unfaithful women in their sample may be due to mitigating factors relating to bisexual identity such as internalised biphobia and socio-cultural pressure to choose a male partner over a female one. Munsen and Stelbourn (1999) note that not all lesbians practice and idealise coupling and not all successful long-term relationships are monogamous. It does appear though that open relationships are common amongst gay men whereas polyamory is more common among bisexuals and lesbians (Barker, 2011; Munsen & Stelbourn, 1999).

Research suggests that gay men in open relationships do not differ from monogamous gay men in satisfaction or attachment (Ramirez & Brown, 2010), but non-monogamous gay men are more open with being gay (Bricker & Horne, 2007). Non-monogamous gay men with explicit rules show greater satisfaction than non-monogamous gay men with no rules (Ramirez & Brown, 2010). A recent online survey of gay men found non-monogamous gay males to be less committed and to perceive alternative partners as more desirable (Whitton, Weitbrecht, & Kuryluk, 2015). However, interview research has shown that gay men in open relationships still experience pain and hurt in their relationships (Worth, Reid & McMillan, 2002). In female LGB relationships, polyamory or non-monogamy has been theorised as offering relief from perceived problems such as 'lesbian fusion' and 'lesbian bed death' (Munsen & Stelboun, 1999). In non-monogamous relationships honesty and clearly communicated boundaries are vitally important (Jamieson, 2004; McLean, 2004; Ritchie & Barker, 2006). However, sometimes there may be miscommunications and misunderstandings of these boundaries leading to feelings generally associated with infidelity (Orleans, 1999).

There is limited research on LGB couples and infidelity (Blow & Hartnett, 2005) and the research that exists is now quite dated (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). The breach of relationship exclusivity and relationship rules is central to experiences and definitions of infidelity. Thus, infidelity is associated with differing definitions ranging from narrow definitions of (hetero) sexual intercourse outside the primary relationship to broader definitions of breaking the agreed rules of the relationship, which can be sexual and/or emotional (Blow & Hartnett, 2005; Moller & Vossler, 2014). This broader definition considers the experiences of many different sexual identities and relationship types including LGB couples and monogamy/non-monogamy agreements. There is a general consensus that infidelity is hurtful, has negative consequences, and negatively affects most relationships (Kluwer & Karremans, 2009). It can also have positive consequences in certain

circumstances (Olsen, Russell, Higgins-Kessler & Miller, 2002) such as leading to the opportunity to work therapeutically on relationship issues (Vossler & Moller, 2014).

Therefore, particular attention needs to be directed towards how couples negotiate implicit or explicit rules of (non)monogamy in their relationships and the effect that breaking these rules may have on their relationship and relationship practices. It is apparent that there are noteworthy differences in how individuals define the rules of their relationship and many ways in which they could construct them. The fluid nature of the rules, and the ways in which couples construct them, helps to maintain relationships through negotiating of boundaries. It is when there are miscommunications or differences in rules/values that problems may arise. Communication is paramount with respect to relationship rules, demonstrating that rules are attached to practices of intimacy through talking, listening and demarcating boundaries. This connection is also displayed through notions of acceptable behaviour for (non)monogamous relationships, where intimate practices exclusive to a monogamous relationship might not be exclusive to the primary couple in a non-monogamous relationship.

To conclude, the most relevant aspects of relationship practices have been discussed. These different but connected areas contribute to the relationship experiences of LGB couples in how they maintain, construct, and understand their relationships. The focus has largely been on experiences within the couple through attending to the practices of their relationships. However, couples do not experience their relationships within a dyadic capsule, and there are many other relationships and 'things' that affect the relationship experiences of LGB couples including the impact of family, friendships, and interactions in public settings.

2.4 Relationships and Communities

There have been substantial explorations into the relationships and communities of LGB individuals and couples within the social sciences. This has often been embedded in the context of

identity where LGB individuals have negative experiences of marginalisation, discrimination, and rejection. This has had an impact on the relationships and communities that LGB individuals belong to, cultivate, and create. For example, Weeks et al. (2001) examined the family and community relationships of LGB individuals and couples, where they distinguish between families of choice and families of origin. Due to the increasing acceptance of LGB individuals within the zeitgeist of the UK, these experiences are evolving, and Heaphy et al. (2013) noted more recently how many LGB couples were maintaining elaborate networks of families *and* friendships. However, although marginalisation and discrimination are perceived to be decreasing, it is still a remarkable source of apprehension and fear for some LGB individuals and a painful and negative experience for others. The first part of this section concentrates on tracing the experiences of marginalisation and discrimination of LGB individuals throughout the literature and the second part centres on the relationships with family, friends, and community.

2.4.1 Marginalisation and Discrimination

Earlier in the chapter, I briefly touched upon how coming out narratives and experiences of marginalisation and discrimination were no longer the defining story of LGB couples in the UK. Heaphy et al. (2013) noted that there were still stories of marginalisation, hostility, and estrangement being told by LGB couples in their research. Stonewall (2013) reported on statistics relating to hate crime and found that one in six LGB individuals had experienced hate crime within the three years before the survey. Thus LGB individuals still face prejudice despite social attitudes improving and changes in social policy and legislation. Thomas (2014) notes that, although homophobic attitudes were eroding, only 47% of respondents in the British Social Attitudes survey thought sexual relations between adults of the same sex was 'not wrong at all'. This represents the potential complexity of the evolving socio-cultural and temporal context.

LGB individuals have been marginalised in different ways in the literature (Clarke et al., 2010). Lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men are frequently treated as a homogenous group when in fact

there is substantial diversity within each group (Savin-Williams & Cohen, 1996), particularly when compared to heterosexuals (Barker, 2008). Decisive characteristics are often ignored in research, such as gender, class, race, religion/spirituality, and rural life (Clarke et al., 2010), all of which have been shown to impact on the experiences of LGB couples in different ways (Heaphy et al., 2013). Bisexual and queer individuals are often obscured due to the more powerful positions held by lesbians and gay men (Clarke et al., 2010). Moving away from the literature and concentrating on relationship experiences, pervasive stereotypes remain in perceptions of LGB individuals, including those already mentioned around monogamy and sex, gender, communication and intimacy, and an assumption that LGB relationships are less stable and secure. Lesbians are perceived to be unattractive and masculine, and gay men to be effeminate and passive (Shaw et al., 2012), while bisexuals tend to be viewed through commonly misheld stereotypes depicting them as greedy, going through a 'phase', scared to come out as lesbian or gay, and having multiple partners (Barker, 2008; Eliassen, 2001). Bisexuals also have to deal with the invisibility of their identity where they appear to have a gay/lesbian identity when in a same-sex relationship and a heterosexual identity when in an opposite sex relationship (Barker et al., 2012; Robinson, 2013). Bisexual and queer individuals may also be on the receiving end of 'double discrimination', whereby they are not accepted by lesbians and gay men either (Ochs, 1996).

As a result it is important to note the distinctions between homophobia and biphobia and how these might be experienced differently (Barker et al., 2012; Stonewall, 2012b). Violence and hate crimes because of sexual orientation occur, and in fact are under-reported (Peel, 2002; Stonewall, 2013). For example, in the UK between April 2006 and March 2007, there were 822 cases of homophobic crime dealt with by the CPS, with a 73.5% conviction rate (Clarke et al., 2010). However, Stonewall (2013) found that experiences of reporting hate crime were unsatisfactory, with fewer than one in ten reports leading to convictions. Herek (2009) reported that gay men are more likely to be the victims of violence and that location was important, with crimes against women more likely to occur in private and against men in public (Herek, Gillis & Cogan, 1999). In a

survey conducted by Stonewall (2013), two-thirds of LGB respondents felt they were at a bigger risk of harassment or intimidation in the community than heterosexuals.

Indeed, prejudice and stigma still exist within a variety of settings such as universities and the workplace (Ellis, 2009; Comstock, 1991). Ellis (2009) surveyed LGB students at UK universities and found that 23% of respondents experienced harassment or discrimination, 16% felt pressure to be silent about their sexuality, and over half had deliberately hidden their sexuality amid fears of discrimination. Schools appear to be a problematic setting for young LGB individuals with 65% of respondents experiencing homophobic bullying (Hunt & Jensen, 2006). However, 79% thought it unlikely that they would be harassed and 77% were comfortable being out. Young LGB individuals are seen to be vulnerable (Shaw et al., 2012) and are more likely to be at risk of suicide (D'Augelli, Hershberger & Pilkington, 1998; ILGA Europe, 2007), which is often associated with coming out and with the associated stigma of having an LGB identity.

In the literature, the thought of and experiences of coming out are connected with negative attitudes, although coming out is seen as positive for the well-being of LGB individuals and the development of their identities (Legate, Ryan, & Weinstein, 2012; Ragins, 2004). Research has shown that LGB individuals are acutely aware of the ramifications of disclosure (Clarke et al., 2010; Hillier, 2002) and coming out is associated with amplified fear due to the risk of receiving a negative reaction from family members (D'Augelli, 1998). As a result, disclosure of sexual identity involves evaluations of 'safe' spaces and individuals (Clarke et al., 2010). Gabb and Fink (2015) found that younger LGB couples in their sample were more likely to anticipate consequences when displaying their relationship to others. In terms of coming out to others, typically, research has recognised that LGB individuals might disclose identity to their peers before their parents (Clarke et al., 2010), but sometimes the decision is taken out of the individual's hands when parents ask their LGB child outright or their identity is discovered (Hillier, 2002). Disclosure is also an ongoing process where opportunities to hide or disclose identities disrupt social norms and

involve complex decisions around space (Kitzinger, 2000). For example, one study analysing telephone conversations made by lesbians found that in institutional settings when faced with heterosexist assumptions participants passed as heterosexual, explicitly challenged them, or discretely embedded their coming out (Land & Kitzinger, 2005).

In relation to reactions to disclosure, results of several studies on LGB individuals revealed approximately 40 to 60% of parents react negatively to their child's disclosure of their sexual orientation (Cramer & Roach, 1988; Rotherham-Borus, Hunter & Rosario, 1994; Strommen, 1989). Parental reactions are associated with sadness, regret, and depression plus fear for their child's well-being (Boxer, Cook & Herdt, 1991), and some LGB individuals have been thrown out of their family homes (Shaw et al., 2012; Weeks et al., 2001). There are intersections with other cultural identities such as race, ethnicity, and religion which make decisions about disclosure more difficult (Clarke et al., 2010; Heaphy et al., 2013). For example, religious beliefs have been associated with more negative outcomes (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1988). The negative reactions associated with coming out generally subside over the period of time in which parents grieve the loss of their previous perceptions of their child as a heterosexual individual and transform them into a positive resolution (Hancock, 1991).

However, Gorman-Murray (2008b) noted the available research tended to have a negative focus and ignored any positive experiences of individuals. More recent research indicated conflicting results which suggest that, despite some negative reactions, few LGB participants felt the relationship with their parents had changed emphatically (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). The context of the disclosure and the characteristics of the family or situation are essential to consider when exploring reactions to coming out (Gorman-Murray, 2008b). For example, Willoughby, Doty and Malik (2008), in a systematic literature review of research on families of young LGB individuals, found that reactions to coming out were contingent upon attitudes and beliefs about LGB individuals, other family pressures, and available resources (such as positive relationships).

Heaphy et al. (2013) found that the majority of participants received favourable reactions from parents, which may exemplify the increasing acceptance of LGB individuals. A greater exposure to issues of sexuality may be the cause of findings suggesting individuals in this generation are more likely to disclose their sexual orientation (Clarke et al., 2010).

Despite increasing visibility, negative experiences still occur even though these may be decreasing. My focus on the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples allows for interrogation of the zeitgeist of acceptance and more liberal attitudes towards homosexuality (Park et al., 2013) alongside potential experiences of discrimination. It is clear that marginalisation, discrimination, and prejudice affect the experiences of LGB individuals, which in turn impacts thoughts around, and reactions to, coming out. The discussions of coming out thus far have largely concerned the initial reactions of family and friends. There is extensive research on the impact of LGB identity on family relationships and friendships moving past these initial reactions.

2.4.2 Family and Friendships

Familial relationships and friendships have a significant impact on LGB relationship experiences. Weeks et al. (2001) examined the ways in which LGB individuals were creating their own families through friendships as a result of negative reactions from members of their families of origin and the wider societal context of their experiences.

The concept of the family has long been associated with parent-child relationships and is often synonymous with the idealised, heterosexual nuclear family (Bettani, 2014). Research has demonstrated that 'the family' comes in a variety of forms whereby there is no such thing as 'the family' but rather 'families' (Gabb, 2010a). Subsequently, normative ideals of the family are challenged in practice where they do not represent the reality of family life (Gabb, 2010a). Morgan (1996) postulated that family is not what we are but something we do, where the term

'family practices' attends to the ways in which families are created through acts of care and intimate relating (Gabb, 2010a; Jamieson, 1998; Valentine & Hughes, 2012).

A noticeable narrative of LGB coming out has been one of familial estrangement due to negative reactions from family members (Heaphy et al., 2013). Previous research has linked this estrangement to distance and mobility where LGB individuals move away from family contexts to enable relational possibilities (Weston, 1995). This, together with the lack of norms or scripts to follow and the changing meaning of family, allows LGB individuals and couples to be creative with respect to their relationships. Results from qualitative studies have shown how LGB individuals create chosen families through friendships (Weeks et al., 2001; Weston, 1991) particularly to seek a sense of belonging and community. Friendship is seen as 'key to understanding non-heterosexual ways of life' (Weeks et al., 2001, p. 50) and as being at the heart of critical sexual communities where LGB individuals can develop their identities and relating selves (Heaphy et al., 2001).

These communities consist of other LGB individuals who can create a sense of belonging and shared meaning (Heaphy et al., 2013; Weeks et al., 2001). Gay men cultivate friendships with other men (Nardi, 1999) and lesbians have networks of friends and ex-lovers (Weinstock, 2004). There are often distinctions between lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities. There are smaller overlapping social worlds within the larger community (Jamieson, 1998) and many variations within lesbian, bisexual, and gay communities, creating multiple belongings (Weeks et al., 2001). There are also overlaps between narratives of community and of family and friendships (Weeks et al., 2001). Thus, community is inherently linked to experiences of family and friendship, which are inevitably changing along with the contexts in which they are embedded.

Weeks et al. (2001) found that although there were strong narratives of meaningful friendship networks providing family-like support, some LGB individuals spoke of the importance of

relationships with blood relatives. Most of the younger LGB couples involved in research by Heaphy et al. (2013) enjoyed 'full' acceptance by their family and viewed familial relationships as more significant than the 'transitional' friendships in their lives. The friendships of these couples indicate changes within the community where they cultivated mixed sex and mixed sexual identity friendships as opposed to the majority of the participants in Weeks et al.'s study (2001) where friendships were largely homo-social. Results from a quantitative survey found LGB individuals were more likely to report more cross-orientation friendships than heterosexuals (Galupo, 2007). In addition, there was a higher instance of gay men having cross-sex friendships and bisexual individuals cultivating friendships with heterosexuals.

It would seem then, that the pattern of seeking a sense of belonging and community with other LGB individuals based on sexual orientation (or gender) may be lessening. The landscape is not as simple, as many younger LGB couples were reluctant to demarcate between 'family and friends', thus indicating the importance of both (Heaphy et al., 2013). This reveals interesting generational changes in the relationship experiences of LGB individuals and couples. Without the experience of familial estrangement there is no need to reinvent identity and relationships in the same way that previous generations of LGB individuals and couples did (Heaphy et al., 2013). In this sense, LGB individuals and couples have larger networks of relationships with family and friends, which are central to their lives and their relationship experiences. These networks of relationships provide a sense of community and belonging. They also offer a valuable source of support which can have beneficial effects on well-being and mental and physical health, as well as on primary relationship quality. This support is the subject of the next section.

2.5 Relationship Support

An underlying theme throughout the chapter has been how relationships can be a source of tension. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the presence of significant others outside of the couple has a positive effect on relationship quality and a beneficial impact on society because they can help

weather these conflicts through the support they provide. This section discusses relationship support, including partner support and support from family and friends, before exploring the literature on LGB couples counselling.

Recent research results from a survey of over 5700 people in the UK found that 85% of participants who were in a relationship have a good relationship with their partner, the majority of participants have good relationships with their parents, and 90% of the sample had at least one close friend (Sherwood et al., 2014). Observational research with newlyweds found social support from a partner and effective problem solving skills could positively impact management of (personal and relationship) problems and relationship satisfaction over time (Pasch, & Bradbury, 1998). The effective negotiation of everyday relationship practices such as communication, conflict management, and relationship work is crucial to perceptions of partner support (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Miller, 2012).

Findings from quantitative research measuring social support, relationship satisfaction, and individual well-being stipulate the positive benefits accrued through the support of family and friends (Kurdek, 2004, 2006; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986), particularly through their validation of the couple identity (Kurdek, 2004). This is sustained by Gabb & Fink (2015) who outlined that participant relationships were experienced as poorer without the support of significant others. Quantitative research by Graham and Barnow (2013) with over 100 couples (including 66 LGB couples) found that support of friends was important for the relationship quality of LGB couples and that family and friends were influential on the individual well-being of those in LGB couples. Weeks et al. (2001) found that participants who were part of a network of family and friends identified it as a source of support, care, and love. Networks of friendships were shown to work best when they were embedded in taken-for-granted norms of mutual support and respect, and were seen as a source of continuity, particularly when couple relationships broke down (Weeks et al., 2001). Heaphy et al. (2013) echoed this sentiment stating that family and friends were a

source of support, comfort, stability, and continuity. Sometimes though, more structured or formal relationship support is required such as counselling or therapy (Relationships Alliance, 2014).

Couple counselling has been found to be beneficial for improving relationship quality and satisfaction, conflict resolution skills, and well-being and mental health (Lebow, Chambers, Christensen, & Johnson, 2012; Klann, Hahlweg, Baucom, & Kroeger, 2011; Relationships Alliance, 2014). For example, Lebow et al. (2012) conducted a comprehensive review of research on couple therapy and discovered that therapy positively impacted 70% of couples. However, there is a dearth of literature on LGB couples therapy (Spitalnick & McNair, 2005). Research has tended to concentrate on the role of the therapist, comparisons to heterosexual couples, and stressing the contexts of LGB individuals and couples (Shaw et al., 2012; Spitalnick & McNair, 2005). For LGB individuals and couples, seeking relationship support may involve apprehension of encountering a negative counselling experience. For instance, a third of gay men, a quarter of bisexual men, and over 40% of lesbian women have reported negative or mixed reactions from mental health professionals about their sexuality (DOH, 2006). Qualitative findings of research with trainee counsellors outlined how counsellors spoke of having heterosexist assumptions challenged in their practice with LGB individuals (Grove, 2009). Other studies have found that some counsellors may have inadequate skills when working with LGB clients due to a lack of knowledge and training on sexuality (Evans, 2003; Galgut, 1999).

Notwithstanding these criticisms, there is growing awareness of ethical practice that meets the needs of LGB individuals (Langdridge & Barker, 2013) with counsellors being increasingly attentive to the socio-cultural and political contexts of LGB individuals (Langdridge, 2014; Shaw et al., 2012). Sexual diversity training is becoming more widely available through CPDs (Shaw et al., 2012), assumptions are being challenged (Grove, 2009), and safe spaces for LGB individuals to discuss their lives are being created (Bradford, 2012; Evans & Barker, 2010). Thus, there is an

emphasis in the counselling literature (by practitioners and organisations alike) on comprehensive counsellor and therapist training. This training stresses being aware of the additional issues LGB individuals and couples could face, including the differences between and within LGB identities, such as gay male clients who are in HIV seroconcordant/discordant relationships (Spitalnick & McNair, 2005), the issue of bisexual invisibility (Barker, 2008), and homo/bi-phobia and heterosexism (Langdridge, 2014). Training on sexual diversity is however, viewed by practitioners as only partially meeting the concerns of LGB clients, which means counsellors/therapists are seeking further training after initial qualification to increase knowledge and confidence (Shaw et al., 2012).

Consideration of lesbian, bisexual, and gay norms is vital for successful couple therapy (Bepko & Johnson, 2000; Biaggio, Coan & Adams, 2002). Bepko and Johnson (2000) stipulated that therapists needed to be aware of problems with coming out including rejection of one's own identity or negative reactions from others, being mindful of stress due to minority status, potential issues about gender norms (for example, effeminate gay men), and social status. Other issues might concern relationship rules and boundaries relating to monogamy and non-monogamy (Shaw et al., 2012), and domestic abuse and power struggles (Ristock & Timbang, 2005). LGB couples attending counselling or therapy are immediately disclosing their identities which might cause discomfort, and therefore this needs to be recognised (Grove et al., 2013). Research has also stipulated the importance of striking a balance between having awareness of the unique experiences of LGB individuals and couples, and not attributing problems or experiences to sexuality (Grove et al., 2013; King & McKeown, 2003). After conducting focus groups with LGB individuals, Grove (2003) argued that providing a service to LGB couples may be a difficult task for helping agencies because LGB couples do not want to be treated differently but there is a necessity for understanding their potential dissimilarities. In cases where this balance is not achieved, there is the potential for negative counselling experiences. Research by Milton (1998) explored counsellors' views of good and bad practice when working with LGB individuals,

using a survey. Helpful practice included not trying to change sexual identity, facilitating identity development, and increasing client self-esteem. Unhelpful practice included an overemphasis on sexual identity, assumptions of heterosexuality, using heterosexual metrics for frames of reference, and a lack of knowledge of LGB issues.

Interview research with LGB couples who had attended couples counselling has shown that couples do not want to have to educate their counsellor about their identity but rather appreciate a knowledgeable counsellor (Grove & Blasby, 2009). There has been influential research on the preference for a specific counsellor/therapist sexual orientation and gender, with the results dependent upon client gender/sexual identity. In conducting interviews with lesbians Galgut (2005) found that participants would prefer a lesbian therapist, but there appear to be conflicting results as other research indicates that LGB participants might perceive this as problematic (Hansen, 2005) or find it more powerful to see an affirmative heterosexual counsellor (Evans & Barker, 2010). Overall, it seems counsellor sexual identity may not be very significant (Evans & Barker, 2010; King et al., 2007). In fact, there may be a stronger preference for a female therapist than for a lesbian or gay therapist (Kaufman et al., 1997; Platzer, 1998). Therefore, there are many things for LGB couples to contemplate regarding accessing relationship support in the form of counselling or therapy. The literature demonstrates that these include issues of similarity and difference, the contexts of LGB relationship experience, reflections on what organisation to use, the potential for negative experiences occurring, and counsellor/therapist preference.

This section has underlined aspects of relationship support including receiving support from a partner, family, friends, and counselling or therapy. It contextualises the potential avenues that couples can use for relationship support and the thoughts, feelings, and experiences which might occur when seeking such support. These are fundamental to the exploration of the relationship experiences of the younger LGB couples in the TTC study.

2.6 Time and Space in Relationships

Time and space are concepts which have been given considerable focus in the wider social science literature (Hodson & Vanini, 2007). They can be experienced and understood in many ways (Bergmann, 1992; Urry, 2004). Throughout this chapter, the impact of time and space on relationships has been implicit in the findings of previous research. For example, I have outlined how LGB experiences are embedded in a temporal dimension of increasing acceptance and visibility which has impacted upon legal recognition and experiences of family planning and parenthood (Heaphy et al., 2013; Park et al., 2013; Weeks et al., 2001). Changes over time have been delineated in research on long-term relationships and intimacy (Heaphy et al., 2013; Mackey et al., 1997), socio-cultural meanings of love (Barker, 2013; Giddens, 1991), and on the networks of social support available to LGB individuals (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998; Weeks et al., 2001). Likewise, the spatial dimensions of relationships have been acknowledged by exploring the home (Gorman-Murray, 2006, 2008a), how intimate practices are embedded in and can change through different spaces (Gabb and Fink, 2015), and the display of LGB identity with respect to parenthood (Gabb, 2005b) and in 'safe spaces' (Clarke et al., 2010). However, much of the relationship research here does not overtly focus on time and space. In this thesis, I therefore intend to explicitly attend to the temporal and spatial dimensions of participant accounts to investigate how these notions can afford insight into the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a review of the literature relevant to the experiences of the younger LGB couples in the TTC study. Research on long-term relationships was highlighted by tracing the focus of relationships from identity to examining the effect of the intimate turn in society (Weeks et al., 2001), outlining how more recent approaches to studying relationships have moved away from comparisons of heterosexual and LGB couples towards looking at couple diversity and relationships experiences (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Heaphy et al., 2013). The importance of attending to the practices and everyday experiences of relationships has been emphasised. Focusing on

relationship practices included exploring the effects of legal recognition and LGB parenthood on LGB relationships; the role and meaning of the home, with particular attention directed towards the division of labour; intimacy and intimate practices including emotion work, communication and sexual intimacy; conceptions of love; and relationship rules where the literature on monogamy, non-monogamy and infidelity in LGB relationships were discussed.

The remainder of the chapter moved onto the worlds beyond the primary relationship. This began with the history of marginalisation and discrimination of LGB individuals and couples before considering families, friendships, and communities, demonstrating that LGB relationships are embedded in wider networks of relationships. The final section delineated the relationship support gained from partners, family and friends, and the literature on counselling and therapy for LGB individuals and couples. Throughout the chapter, the intersections of age, generation, and gender were highlighted where pertinent, together with the crucial socio-cultural and temporal contexts that might affect relationship experiences and understandings. Changes over time and in different spatial contexts were seen as vital to these appraisals. This review serves to contextualise and give background information with respect to the range of diverse relationship experiences relevant for the younger LGB couples in the TTC study and the ways in which the research can contribute to and extend understandings of long-term relationships, and of those of younger LGB couples in particular. The next chapter focuses on the methodology of the research.

Chapter 3 : Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I detail the methodology employed to answer my research questions. The research design is introduced, providing information on the methodological approach, where I outline the sample, recruitment process, and methods used within the research. These sub-sections comprise fieldwork with two participant groups – younger LGB couples and relationship support counsellors from Relate. Following this, I discuss the role of field notes and reflexive practice, provide information on the method of data analysis, and conclude by explaining the ethical considerations relevant to the study.

3.2 Design

The TTC study adopted a methodological approach informed by the growing body of social science research on intimate life (Gabb, 2010a; Gabb & Fink, 2015; Heaphy et al., 2013; Jamieson, 1998; Mackey et al., 1997; Miller, 2012; Smart, 2007). This approach enabled me to explore the intersections of the psychological and social dimensions of participants' lives whilst attending to the biographical, socio-cultural, and temporal contexts of personal experience (Gabb, 2010a; Smart, 2007). Through this, I could interrogate and examine the complex, emotional, and multi-dimensional behaviours of intimate relating situated in the everyday lives of participants (Gabb, 2010a; Smart, 2007). The approach thus served to focus attention on how younger LGB couples 'do' relationships by considering the 'practices' which combine to sustain diverse couple relationships (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Morgan, 2011).

A social constructionist framework was applied which allowed for the experiences and views of participants to be situated in the wider context of interactions where meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced (Burr, 1995), as well as constructed by the participant and the researcher (Ponterotto, 2005; Timulak, 2014). The goal was to develop understanding of the lived

experiences of participants (Ponterotto, 2005) whilst retaining awareness of my role in the construction of the interactions and remaining as close to participant experience as possible (Timulak, 2014). Reflexively positioning myself within the research approach (see Chapter 1 for standpoint) and reflecting on interactions throughout the analysis and the conclusion aided me in this.

To explore the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples, multiple qualitative methods were conducted including the use of emotion maps, visual scrapbooks/diaries, individual interviews, and photo collage elicitation couple interviews. Using multiple methods has proven effective in producing multi-dimensional material and accessing accounts of everyday emotional and relational lives (Gabb, 2009, 2010a; Miller, 2006; Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies, 2003), arguably more so than traditional interviews or discussions alone would have (Wall, Higgins, Hall, & Woolner, 2013). Multiple methods facilitated access to how couples talked about their relationships and enabled consideration of their thoughts, feelings, and interactions with each other. The use of visual methods included the production, organisation, and interpretation of visual stimuli such as images (Prosser, 2007) and types of visual communication such as photography, drawing, signs, diagrams, and paintings (Wall et al., 2013). Visual methods held the potential for depicting a more nuanced view of the lived experiences of participants (Literat, 2013), moving beyond the confines of narrative forms of communication (Bowes-Catton, Barker & Richards, 2011).

Focus groups were completed to examine the knowledge and experiences Relate counsellors had with respect to working with LGB couples, including their attitudes towards and understandings of these relationships. Focus groups are effective in accessing attitudes, opinions, and experiences relative to a specific context (Myers, 1998; Wilkinson, 2004) and are a relatively time and cost effective way of collecting data from several participants simultaneously (Wilkinson, 2004). Focus groups aimed to generate data on relationship support for LGB couples enabling exploration of

potential relationship issues, and the ways these could be resolved through couple counselling. These complementary data also offer Relate valuable information for their organisation and counsellor training around LGB individuals and couples. This will be provided to them with a separate report and through future research publications.

In the subsequent sections, I outline the methodology from three key studies before providing information on participants, recruitment, and methods for fieldwork with the LGB couples and Relate counsellors.

3.3 The Key Studies

As mentioned in the introduction, the TTC study has been influenced by three key studies (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Heaphy et al., 2013; Henderson et al., 2007). Each study has informed my research in particular ways. This section details the methodological information relevant for the TTC study including how the samples are similar and different, and the ways in which the approaches and methods have shaped this research.

The *Inventing Adulthoods Study* (Henderson et al., 2007) utilised longitudinal mixed methods including the use of focus groups, memory books, and interviews with a cohort of young people over a ten year period. This resulted in six rounds of data collection but not all individuals participated in all fieldwork. Participants were aged 11 to 17 (first participation) and 17 to 28 (sixth participation). The project's memory book method aided the development of the visual scrapbook diaries in this project (outlined in this chapter). Their theorising on social capital and biography served to draw my attention to the ways in which narratives are situated within the context of individual differences. Relationships were part of the focus on young people's lives and LGB participants were included as part of the sample. The study was an early influence in shaping the TTC study and this thesis.

The *Enduring Love?* project (Gabb & Fink, 2015) used multiple methods and focused on adult couple relationships where participants experienced their relationships in the same socio-cultural and temporal contexts as participants in the TTC study. Four participants were included in both studies due to the TTC study's connection to the *Enduring Love?* project (see Chapter 1). The qualitative dimension of the sample comprised 50 couples, with participants categorised within three age cohorts ranging from 18 to 65+, and 30% of the sample were LGB couples. The methodology of the TTC study research was modelled on the *Enduring Love?* project. The project's key focal points were gender, generation, and parenthood which differ from my focus with respect to younger LGB couples. The study has been a key influence for my research, and in particular the attention paid to the 'practices' that couples 'do' in their relationships and their diverse ways of relating.

The study on *Same-Sex Marriages* (Heaphy et al., 2013) remains the closest to the TTC study sample. There were 50 LGB couples (25 male and 25 female) who were interviewed both together and apart. Participants were aged between 21 and 39, and were in civil partnerships before they were 35 years old. This attention to younger LGB couples is similar to the TTC study, but my research includes couples outside of civil partnerships, thus allowing interrogation of the meanings of marriage and civil partnership within relationship experiences. Due to the introduction of same-sex marriage, the participants within the TTC study are uniquely positioned to discuss the meanings and differences between civil partnership and marriage for their relationships.

Highlighting these key methodological points illuminates the ways in which the participants and methodology of the TTC study builds upon and differs from these three key influential studies. This serves as a backdrop for the rest of this chapter and the contributions of the TTC study to the literature on relationships.

3.4 Fieldwork with LGB Couples

3.4.1 Participants

The TTC study explores what constitutes long-term for younger LGB couples. Participants were therefore asked to self-define as being in a long-term LGB relationship so these understandings could be unpicked. Other aspects of social diversity were attended to including gender, relationship status, socio-economic status, race/ethnicity, education level, and household composition/residence. These demographic variables were perceived as important contextual factors in understanding younger LGB couple and individual biographies and relationship experiences. Participation was voluntary.

There were 29 participants, consisting of 14 LGB couples and one individual participant. There were eight female couples, six male couples, and one individual female participant. In terms of sexual orientation, 12 participants identified as lesbian, 11 as gay, five as bisexual, and one as other. There were 26 white participants and three participants who identified as black or minority ethnic (BME). The relationship length of couples ranged from one year to 11 years. Five couples were in a civil partnership, two couples who were non-monogamous/polyfidelitous, and one couple lived apart together (LAT). No couples had children. However, 12 couples expressed that parenthood was a future possibility and three of these were actively planning for children. Three couples had no desire for children in the future. There were two participants and one couple with experience of Relate counselling and one couple with experience of couple counselling from another source. The couple who lived outside of the UK and the individual participant were included in the sample specifically due to their experience of counselling. Rates of attrition were low. However, two couples withdrew in the early stages of recruitment and fieldwork. Completion of fieldwork took longer than planned and required more time and financial outlay due to problems in recruitment (outlined in the next section). As a result, the sample is not as diverse as had been desired. The majority of participants were white British and educated to degree level which may have shaped the data in particular ways. Nonetheless, the accounts of relationship

experiences are rich and the sample is diverse in many other identity aspects. Table 3.1 provides further information as to the demographic characteristics of participants.

Participants ranged in age from 21 to 38 years old. There were five participants aged between 21 and 25, 12 participants aged 26 to 30, seven participants aged 31 to 35, and five participants aged 36 or over. The original intended age range of participants was 18 to 35 but this was extended to facilitate recruitment. As mentioned in Chapter 1, there were multiple factors which informed how participants described their age, and throughout analysis this posed a challenge to definitions of participants through their cohort. The term 'young people' or 'young adults' has been used to define a range of age cohorts in social sciences research including teenage or school age samples (Donovan & Hester 2008; Formby 2011; Henderson et al., 2007) or older adults between 20 and 35 (Heaphy et al., 2013; Jamieson et al., 2001).

Table 3.1 LGB Participant Demographic Data

Pt No.	Age	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Length of Rel.	Relationship Status	Education	Employment	Ethnicity	Monogamy	Living Situation	Counselling Experience
1a	21	Female	Lesbian	1 year	Partners	A Levels	Student	White British	Monogamous	Living Apart	No Counselling
1b	21	Female	Lesbian	1 year	Partners	A Levels	Student	White British	Monogamous	Living Apart	No Counselling
2a	24	Male	Gay	3 years	Partners	Postgrad	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
2b	23	Male	Gay	3 years	Partners	Postgrad	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
3a	30	Female	Lesbian	7 years	Engaged (Marriage)	Undergrad	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
3b	36	Female	Lesbian	7 years	Engaged (Marriage)	Professional	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
4a	30	Female	Lesbian	3 years	Partners	Undergrad	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
4b	31	Female	Lesbian	3 years	Partners	Undergrad	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
5a	27	Female	Bisexual	4 years	Partners	MA	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
5b	26	Female	Lesbian	4 years	Partners	PhD	Student	White Other	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
6a	35	Male	Gay	2 years	Partners	Postgrad	Unemployed	White Other	Open	Shared Living	No Counselling
6b	35	Male	Gay	2 years	Partners	NVQ Level 3	Unable to work	White British	Open	Shared Living	No Counselling
7a	30	Male	Gay	11 years	Civil Partnership	A Levels	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
7b	29	Male	Gay	11 years	Civil Partnership	Postgrad	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
8a	38	Female	Lesbian	2 years	Engaged (Marriage)	Undergrad	Student	White Other	Monogamous	Cohabiting	Relate Counselling
8b	26	Female	Bisexual	2 years	Engaged (Marriage)	A Levels	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	Relate Counselling
9a	22	Female	Bisexual	2 years	Engaged (Marriage)	A Levels	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
9b	31	Female	Bisexual	2 years	Engaged (Marriage)	Undergrad	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
10a	29	Female	Lesbian	4 years	Civil Partnership	Postgrad	Employed	White Other	Monogamous	Shared Living	No Counselling
10b	28	Female	Lesbian	4 years	Civil Partnership	Postgrad	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Shared Living	No Counselling
11a	33	Female	Lesbian	5 years	Engaged (Civil P)	Postgrad	Employed	Other Ethnic	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
11b	28	Female	Lesbian	5 years	Engaged (Civil P)	Professional	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
12a	31	Other	Gay	3 years	Civil Partnership	Postgrad	Student/PT Work	White Other	Monogamous	Cohabiting	Relate Counselling
12b	33	Male	Gay	3 years	Civil Partnership	A Levels	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
13a	37	Male	Gay	3 years	Partners	NVQ	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
13b	36	Male	Gay	3 years	Partners	NVQ	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	No Counselling
14a	36	Male	Gay	11 years	Civil Partnership	Postgrad	Employed	Other Ethnic	Open	Cohabiting	Other Counselling
14b	28	Male	Other	11 years	Civil Partnership	Postgrad	Employed	Other Ethnic	Open	Cohabiting	Other Counselling
P1	27	Female	Bisexual	8 years	Partners	Undergrad	Employed	White British	Monogamous	Cohabiting	Relate Counselling

For the TTC study, the term 'young' did not comfortably or adequately describe the nuances of age within the cohort. Heaphy et al. (2013) acknowledge this discomfort around using the term 'young' in their research where it may be stretching the definition beyond its reasonable limits. Participants in the TTC study used a variety of terms to describe their age including being 'grown-ups', 'adults', and 'young', but also referring to younger LGB individuals as 'young', where in comparison they felt 'old'. Participants situated the meanings of age through life transitions such as attending university, buying a house, getting married, or having children. This led me to reassess using the term 'young' within the research and opting for 'younger' instead. For the purposes of this thesis and the research, the term 'younger' better describes the significant range of ages amongst participants and the nuances within and between participant accounts of their age. For example, the 38 year old participant described herself as *'feeling like a grown up'* when she had guests but also spoke about the effect of the age difference between herself and her younger partner. Thus, the term 'younger' is used throughout the thesis and the nuances surrounding age and/or generation highlighted where relevant.

Linked to this is the use of 'LGB' to categorise participants' sexual identities. Many research studies group LGBTQ identities, but I did not want to obscure any gender differences within sexual identity differences (or similarities). I additionally thought that including transgender or queer participants as an explicit focus was outside the remit of the study. Any nuances of experience related to gender could be illuminated through participant accounts where pertinent. I chose 'LGB' over using the term 'same-sex' couples because I wanted to avoid making bisexual participants invisible (Barker et al., 2012). This reiterates the importance of attending to language and considering the differing contexts of diverse experiences among participants whilst recognising the limits of the sample.

3.4.2 Recruitment

Younger LGB couples were recruited via a number of avenues in order to maximise the diversity of the sample. My initial recruitment strategy focused on a city in Southwest UK. However, due to difficulties in recruiting couples, the initial geographical area of recruitment was expanded to include the whole of the south of the UK. A convenience and snowballing sampling strategy involved targeting offline and online LGB communities, through social networking websites (e.g. Facebook and Twitter), websites and newspapers, magazines, sports groups, universities, parenting groups, and entertainment venues. Academic email lists and large LGB organisations were approached through email, blogs, and social media, including PACE Health, the LGBT Foundation (formerly the LGF), and Pink Therapy. Personal and professional networks were utilised alongside snowballing from participants already recruited to find more. My Relate connections were used in order to recruit couples with experiences of counselling by advertising in one Relate centre's waiting room.

3.4.3 Methods

Fieldwork with LGB couples was divided into four rounds: an initial meeting, participants keeping visual scrapbooks/diaries and emotion maps, individual interviews, and photo-collage elicitation couple interviews. Throughout the process of fieldwork, I took field notes which served as an aide-memoire and informed my subsequent analysis. The first four couples recruited acted as a pilot sample using the *Enduring Love?* project methodology. Thereafter, I altered the methodology to emphasise the visual and digital dimensions, and these changes are outlined in each section. The aim was to provide enhanced access to the younger participants' lives, focusing on the ways in which technology and social media are typically embedded in the everyday lives of young people in contemporary Britain (Willoughby, 2008).

3.4.4 Initial Meeting

An initial meeting with each couple took place to frame the research, explain what participation entailed, and prepare materials for participation. Participants were given a consent form, information sheet, and method information sheet (see Appendices 1-3). The couples were then shown sample emotion maps, visual scrapbooks/diaries, and photo collages to alleviate anxieties about the visual dimensions (Bowes-Catton et al., 2011). Examples were produced by me, enabling reflexivity and increased understanding of the experience of completing the scrapbooks/diaries and of the potential problems participants may have faced during the research process (Harvey, 2011; Thomson & Holland, 2005). At this stage, informed consent was given by participants and an opportunity for questions and feedback was provided. A quantitative survey was completed by each participant as a useful way to collect demographic data to inform analysis (See Appendix 4). The couples were asked to draw a floor plan of their home which could be reproduced for their emotion maps (a technique I outline shortly).

The initial meeting took place either face-to-face in the couple's home or via Skype. Skype is a web-based, freely available programme enabling individuals to video call online (Cater, 2011; Hanna, 2012). During a Skype call, a full screen image of each couple was visible allowing for visual interaction that included facial cues and body language (Gillham, 2005; Saumure & Given, 2010) that shed light on the couple dynamic. Using Skype was a cost-effective way to bridge geographical distances between researcher and couple, and where used, was less time-consuming than travelling to couples' homes for an initial meeting (Cater, 2011; Hanna, 2012; Saumure & Given, 2010). Where Skype was used for initial meetings, participants filled out their consent forms and survey questionnaires electronically prior to the meeting and provided the floor plan for their emotion maps via email.

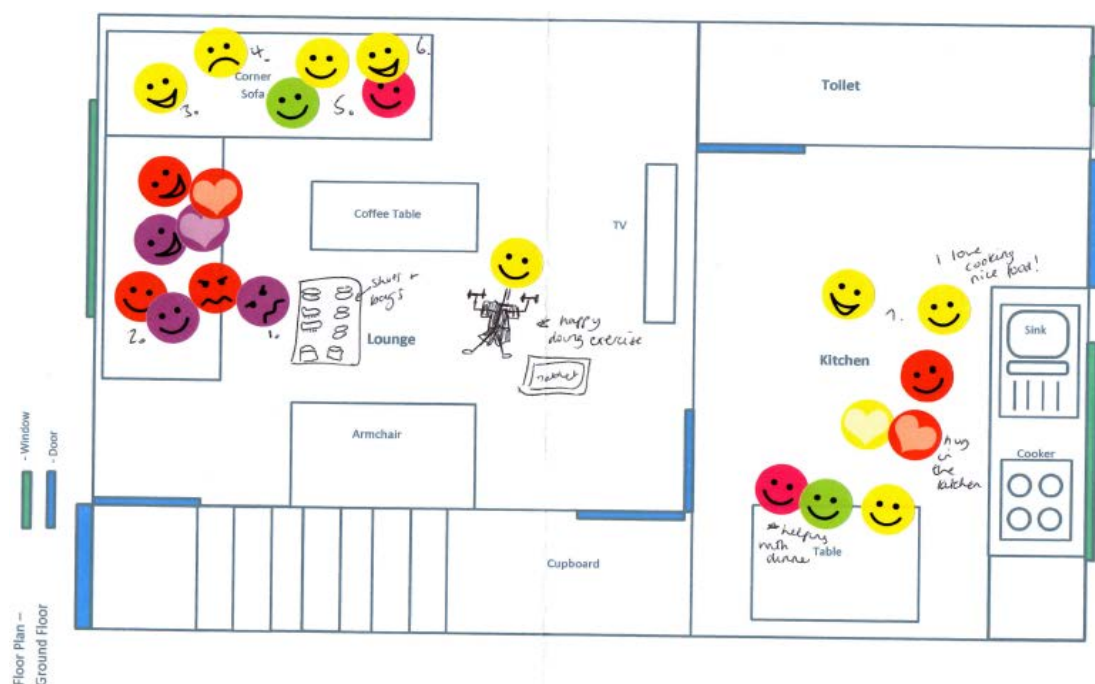
3.4.5 Emotion Maps

Following the initial meeting couples were asked to complete an emotion map for one week. The emotion map is an innovative visual method pioneered by Dr Jacqui Gabb and has been used in research on family practices of intimacy (Gabb, 2010a) and contemporary couple relationships (Gabb & Fink, 2015). Participants who have used the method often felt empowered (Gabb, 2010a). The emotion maps involved participants placing coloured emoticon stickers (laughter, happiness, sadness, anger, distress, indifference, and love/physical affection) on a floor plan of their home to indicate where different types of interactions occurred. Each person on the map (partner, family, friends, pets, etc.) was assigned a different colour of sticker and identified using an emotion map legend. Each individual was instructed to use one copy of the floor plan for the entirety of the week-long period. Participants were told that the mapping of their emotional interactions was flexible in that they could complete the method at their leisure and convenience (i.e. at the beginning or end of the day or as and when interactions occurred). Where couples lived separately, a floor plan of each of their homes was produced and a copy of each given to both members of the couple.

The completed map produced a starting point for talking about lived emotions and feelings. It visually mapped the affective geography of relational interactions (Gabb, 2010a) and facilitated insight into the emotional dynamic of the couple. Once completed, the emotion maps were used as an elicitation tool in the second part of the individual interviews. An example emotion map can be seen in Figure 3.1¹.

¹ This has been anonymised according to the procedures outlined in the ethics section.

Figure 3.1 Example Emotion Map



3.4.6 Visual Scrapbooks/Diaries

Alongside the emotion maps, couples kept individual visual scrapbooks/diaries for one week. In social research, diaries are becoming a popular resource for enriching data (Waddington, 2005). Solicited diaries provide a space for reflection on experiences and interactions (Elliot, 1997; Gabb, 2010a). They have been identified as beneficial in qualitative research on sensitive and private issues (Harvey, 2011), can access everyday activities and routines (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003; Dunne, 1999), and can explore meanings, practices, and experiences of intimate lives (Harvey, 2011; Kenton, 2010). Diaries can facilitate disclosure of things which may not be revealed in face-to-face settings (Gabb, 2010a) and can be a tool for empowerment (Meth, 2003) giving participants a different means of expressing themselves (Elliot, 1997). Thomson and Holland (2005) reported on their method of using memory books in the *Inventing Adulthoods Study* (Henderson et al., 2007). Memory books were deemed to access 'different voices' of participants which complicated and enriched researchers' perceptions of them (Thomson & Holland, 2005, p. 217). They have also been shown to give insights into how young people use cultural resources and technologies in their accounts of their lives (Mannay, 2010). The visual scrapbooks/diaries in

the TTC study pulled together aspects of both written diaries and memory books (Elliot, 1997; Meth, 2003; Thomson & Holland, 2005).

The visual scrapbooks/diaries were intended to access each individual's thoughts, feelings, and reflections surrounding their everyday activities and how this affected their relationship. Participants were provided with an A5 notebook and asked to complete the scrapbook/diary, for one week, over the same time period as the emotion maps. Participants were given some guidelines as to what they might include in the scrapbook/diary such as: time spent with and without their partner, thoughts, feelings, and interactions important to them and/or their relationship, and anything they have done for themselves or for their partner (See Appendix 3). Each individual was instructed to complete the scrapbook/diary in any way they felt comfortable. They could write and draw, stick in photos, newspapers/magazine cuttings, receipts, copies of text messages, emails, and/or interactions from social media.

Following evaluation of the pilot fieldwork with the first four couples, the visual and digital dimensions were emphasised, with individuals being encouraged to include one or more written/textual interaction and one or more form of imagery. The intention was to access existing cultural practices (Thomson & Holland, 2005) and tap into digital forms of communication such as social networking sites and sharing photos online which are increasingly being used by young people as a rapid form of communication with others, where images can be shared immediately through smartphones, iPads, and laptops (Van House, 2011a).

Use of the internet, especially social networking sites, has led to an explosion of online self-representation (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Van House 2011b) where people can essentially create an image stream of their life (Van House, 2011a). Internet use has increased rapidly in the last decade (Hanna, 2012). In 2013, 73% of adults in the UK accessed the internet every day, and figures demonstrate the internet has changed the way people go about their daily lives, with

increased connectivity on mobile phones and portable devices and higher online consumption of activities previously undertaken on the high street, such as banking and shopping (ONS, 2013). In 2011 social media eclipsed email as a communication tool (Henderson, 2011) and continues to impact the daily lives of individuals and how they behave online, including how they build and maintain relationships (Kietzmann et al., 2012). Multi-platform modes of connectivity include social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and blogs, as well as email and text messages (Minocha, 2012). Recent research has shown that the use of technology, specifically text messages conveying affection, is positively related to relationship satisfaction and attachment in young heterosexual couples (Schade, Sandberg, Bean, Busby & Coyne, 2013). However, it can also be negatively associated with relationships such as internet infidelity (Vossler & Moller, 2014). Communicating via text messages and other forms of virtual messages has been shown to be meaningful amongst couples in the *Enduring Love?* project (Gabb & Fink, 2015). The visual and digital techniques deployed therefore sought to tap into online and digital forms of visual and written communication by giving participants a variety of avenues for scrapbook/diary completion including paper and digital/online methods or combinations of the two (Literat, 2013).

Each scrapbook/diary was participant-led, tailored to the individual and/or couple and flexible in its format. Participants could engage as much as they wanted with the visual, written, and digital aspects of scrapbook/diary completion, which helped to allay participant fears around producing something 'arty' (Bowes-Catton et al., 2011). Once completed, the visual scrapbooks/diaries were used as an elicitation tool alongside the emotion maps for individual interviews. See Figure 3.2 for example diary extracts².

² This has been anonymised according to the procedures outlined in the ethics section.

Figure 3.2 Example Visual Scrapbook/Diary

I have every admiration for her dedication to her sport. I have a maternal pull towards [Friend 1] and am very proud of her achievements.

Me & [Partner] have promised to make every effort to follow & support her exciting new career
Next stop [Venue]. #FIGHTINGSPIRIT

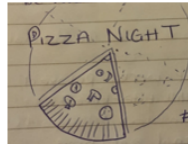


Working tonight. Spent the afternoon doing housework and catching up on emails.

!! Sneaked an episode of Homeland in!!

♡ Nice walk with the mutts today!

They are tired little bears!! So affectionate. We could never be without them now. ♡ (20)



1800 (21)

Nice dinner and catch up on our week and things ahead. #PositiveLove

SEX before work! Nom! ♫ (22)

[Partner] seems a bit emotional tonight? She definitely worries too much!!! I wish she could see what I see sometimes!

She satisfies my soul.

Finished night shift @ 0800 knackered.

*Screw the diet. Bought a filthy bacon sausage and mushroom bag for our breakfast. Happy days!! I'm late home from work. I ♡ that [Partner] knows/assumes I've gone to do this. I'm greeted with a naughty smile.

L♡ve is FOOD!

11.50am

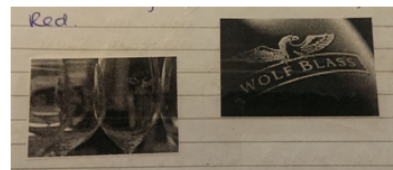
I've managed 1 1/2 sleep. [Partner]'s mum came over for tea & a gossip. I think she's pissed off we aren't seeing her on Mother's Day! [Partner] is always happy to see her mum. This makes me smile! Family is important to me too.

1900 (1)

[Partner] dad visits. [Partner] makes a great dinner.

I've not had alcohol for 3 weeks (emergency driving)

[Partner's Dad] brings me a bottle of Red.



Polished off the wine. Had a great evening with [Partner's Dad]. We laugh a lot. [Partner] cringes at the things me & [Partner's Dad] discuss. I'm obviously drunk. Ooops!

A NICE DAY!

ter is on when I get home. Shower & snuggles in bed with the girl and mutts. (Their Saturday treat).

15pm

and ready for the footy on BT Sport. [Partner] has a cuppa and lunch waiting for me ☺ (24)

e've found a Wkld band to play at our wedding#

ind)-

nd these fellas playing @ [Southern City Locale] when I was last in [Southern City].

♡ the way her eyes light up when we discuss wedding plans!! It's a way off. But it will be special! (25)

[Venue 2]

Hog roast

Folk band

Vintage suits

Beautiful dresses

4 weeks - West Coast America - Camper Van

olmemories

Q

!a refreshing walk in the p***ing rain with the dogs (thanks [Partner]!) (26)

hing the mutts was hilarious! (27)

: time to watch Final score!

bets are all screwed!! ☹

3.4.7 Individual Interviews

The individual interview was separated into two halves – 1) a semi-structured interview and 2) the photo/visual elicitation interview.

The first part of the individual interview was informed by the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) (Wengraf, 2001). The interview began with a single question aimed at inducing narrative (SQUIN) to give the participant as much control and power as possible (Wengraf, 2001). The question asked of participants was: *'Tell me about your relationship: How does it work?'* This allowed participants to engage with aspects of their relational story and discuss the experiences and meanings of their relationship. The intention of the interview was to be non-directive with

the narrative directed by the participant. My role as researcher was to employ active listening techniques and ask narrative-inducing questions using the participants' language (Gabb, 2009; Wengraf, 2001). I followed a research design covering aspects of participant biography, how relationships had changed over time, relationship work, difficulties, and relationship rules. The method acknowledged the impact of wider socio-cultural and temporal contexts and personal biographies in shaping relationship experiences (Roseneil, 2006) and provided a more in-depth and intimate view of the couple (Willig, 2001).

In the photo/visual elicitation part of the interview, participants were asked to discuss meanings, experiences, and understandings of their relationships through their emotion maps and visual scrapbooks/diaries. Using the emotion maps and visual scrapbooks/diaries enabled participants to fill in gaps and potentially served as a memory cue for activities omitted during completion (Harvey, 2011; Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977). The elicitation interview method permitted further clarification of points in the diary including thoughts or feelings written or not written about, whilst drawing comparisons with events outside the recording period (Kenton, 2010). Whereas the visual scrapbook/diary data could provide decontextualised data (Meth, 2003), the interview provided contextual data (Gabb, 2009) by situating narratives in space and time and within the broader socio-cultural and temporal contexts, affording a deeper understanding of the significance to the participant (Kenton, 2010). This was facilitated through the interviews being conducted in participants' homes, reading important visual cues such as body language and tone of voice, and asking participants to elaborate on the meanings of particular experiences. Field notes also assisted with recording essential contextual aspects of the interaction.

3.4.8 Couple Interviews - Photo Collage Elicitation

In the final interview, the couple were interviewed together. Similar to the rationale of two key studies (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Heaphy et al., 2013), there were several reasons for interviewing couples individually *and* together. First, it overcame potential problems with using one method

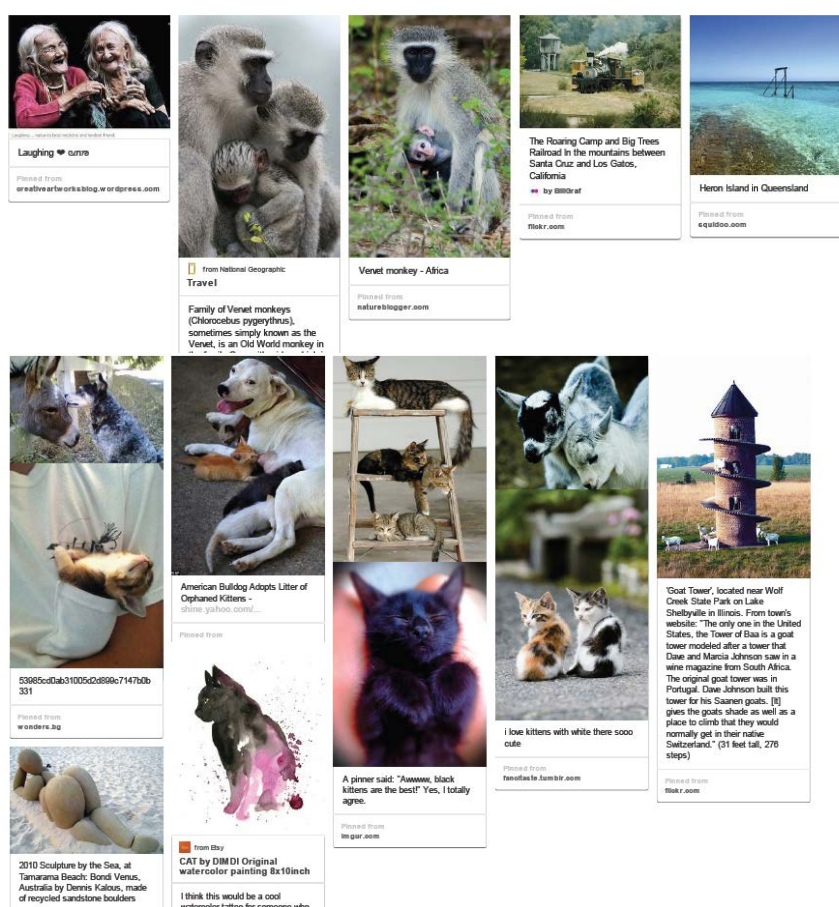
over the other. These include constraining disclosure and one partner dominating interview narratives in couple interviews (Beitin, 2008; Heaphy & Einarsdottir, 2012). Individual interviews alone position the individual account as a sufficient unit of researching couple relationships and may cause participants to worry about confidentiality (Heaphy & Einarsdottir, 2012; Valentine, 1999). This latter point about confidentiality is discussed in the ethics section of this chapter. Second, individual interviews allowed me to explore biographical accounts of relationships whilst couple interviews accessed socio-cultural and temporally embedded meanings of relationship experiences and provided insight into the ways couples interacted (Valentine, 1999). In this sense, the interview narrative produced dynamic interactions which are situated in the context of the research encounter between participant(s) and researcher (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009) and driven by the research questions (Heaphy & Einarsdottir, 2012). Third, having three situated accounts of relationship experiences, combined with the emotion maps and diaries, produced a more nuanced view of the everyday lives of couples including the 'co-construction of couple stories and how they link to individual accounts of relating selves' (Heaphy & Einarsdottir, 2012, p. 56).

Photo elicitation was implemented to explore couples' views about key research themes relating to their long-term relationships, exploring the intersections of socio-cultural meanings and the personal experiences of participants (Gabb & Fink, 2015). Photo elicitation has been used successfully in sociology, history, and anthropology (Schwartz, 1989) and the use of photos as a research tool has grown in recent years (Gabb, 2010a; Hurworth, 2003). Reasons for choosing the method included ensuring participant comfort levels (Banks, 2001), encouraging engagement (Rhodes & Fitzgerald, 2006), providing a way into the participant's world (Gold, 2004), and prompting additional areas to think about (Pain, 2012) which may not have been considered prior to the interview.

In the pilot interviews with the first four couples, photo elicitation included discussion of eight images consisting of ceremonies and celebrations, relationship work, intimacy, children, money,

significant others, policy, and cultural references. After the pilot interviews, couples were asked to collaboratively produce three photo collages on the themes of intimacy, relationship future, and public/private boundaries. Each theme was given a brief description to help the couple get started (see Appendix 3). As with the visual scrapbooks, couples were empowered by being given control over how to create their collages so they could remain in their comfort zones. Collage production involved encouraging the couple to generate original images (Noland, 2006) whilst inviting participants to choose a flexible approach including a wide scope of visual material such as memorabilia, pictures, drawings, and words from various sources (Mannay, 2010). Data production was directed, constructed, and created away from researcher influence (Pain, 2012; Plummer, 2001) and couples could reflect on their lives in ways which may have produced insights into different ways of knowing and understanding (Mannay, 2010). An example collage using Pinterest, an online photo sharing website, can be seen in Figure 3.3³.

Figure 3.3 Example Photo Collage using Pinterest



³This is anonymised in accordance with ethical procedures.

All interviews with LGB couples were audio recorded. Pilot interview data were transcribed by an external company who signed a confidentiality agreement. Subsequent interview data were transcribed by me.

The next section describes the fieldwork with the relationship support counsellors.

3.5 Fieldwork with Relationship Support Counsellors

3.5.1 Participants

This cohort comprised 11 relationship support counsellors from Relate who participated in focus groups at three separate locations around England. There were nine female participants, one male participant, and one participant identified as other. Eight participants identified as heterosexual, two as gay, and one as bisexual. Participants practised in eight different Relate centres around England with some participants practising in more than one centre and several participants having worked in a different location previously. Participants had varying levels of counselling experience and of working with LGB couples. However, none of the counsellors had extensive experience of working with LGB couples and only five counsellor participants described their experience as 'moderate'. Focus Group 1 consisted of three counsellors from different Relate centres who convened especially for the group. Focus Group 2 consisted of five counsellors who worked at the same centre and therefore knew each other prior to the focus group. Focus Group 3 consisted of three counsellors who self-identified as LGB, two of whom knew each other through professional networks prior to the group. Table 3.2 provides an overview of participant demographics.

Table 3.2 Demographic Information on Counsellor Participants

FG #	Name †	Age	Sex/ Gender	Sexual Orientation	Ethnicity	Rel. Status	Highest Education Level	Job Title	Counselling Experience	Experience with LGB Couples	LGBT Training Experiences
1	Jean	[Not given]	Female	Heterosexual	White British	Married	MSc	[Not given]	30 years (15 at Relate)	Moderate	Relate Therapy London CPD
1	Izzy	[Not given]	Female	Heterosexual	White British	Married	MA Degree	Supervisor/ Lecturer	16 years	Limited	CPDs
1	Nina	55	Female	Heterosexual	White British	Couple - Living Together	MA	Senior supervisor & Lecturer	17 years	Moderate	CPD at LGBT; teaching and own reading
2	Nancy	53	Female	Heterosexual	White British	Married	Postgraduate degree	Counsellor	9 years		Years ago CPD Day!
2	Diane	55	Female	Heterosexual	White British	Married	MA	Counsellor	7 years	Moderate	Relate on MA
2	Lola	51	Female	Heterosexual	Asian - Other Asian Background	Married	Degree	Couple Counsellor	17 years	Moderate	Yes - continuously
2	John	62	Male	Heterosexual	White British	Married	PG Diploma	Relationship Counsellor	10 years	Limited	One workshop a long time ago
2	Alice	59	Female	Heterosexual	White British	Married	MA	Psycho-therapist	25 years	Moderate	CPD workshop, PGDip with Relate
3	Stephen	47	Male	Gay	White British	Couple - Living Together	MA	Relationship therapist	5 years	Limited	YES - Pink Therapy CPDs
3	Ellen	55	Other - Fluid	Gay	White British	Not getting round to dating	MA/MSc	HE Programme leader	12 years	Limited	Relate training, additional CPDs and research
3	Nicki	60	Female	Bisexual	White British	Married	BSc Psychology	Counsellor	5.5 Years	Limited	Relate training

† All names have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

3.5.2 Recruitment

Counsellors were recruited through Relate centres in the UK and at the Relate AGM and conference, with initial contact with potential centres and participants mediated through a Relate contact in their central office. Following interest from the potential centres and participants, more project information and materials were provided. For recruitment at the Relate AGM and conference, various 'calls for participants' were emailed to delegates prior to the event and handed out at registration on the day. In Relate regional centres, initial contact was made through the centre manager. Following the withdrawal of two Relate centres before participation could be arranged, recruitment for the final focus group included email contact with Relate centre managers and advertising in the Relate weekly newsletter to access potential counsellors who identified as LGB. This method of recruitment increased variation of experience within the sample.

3.5.3 Method

Focus groups have been used since the 1920s in a variety of fields including marketing, business, and health settings (Wilkinson, 2008) and are now a widely used method in social science research (Hopkins, 2007). Bedford and Burgess (2001) provide a definition of a focus group as 'a one-off meeting of between four and eight individuals who are brought together to discuss a particular topic chosen by the researcher(s) who moderate or structure the discussion' (p. 121). Assessments of the ideal focus group sample size vary in the literature (Carlson & Glenton, 2011) ranging from two up to 12 participants (Longhurst, 1996; Morgan, 1997). There is considerable debate about how to use focus groups, the practicalities of conducting them, and the best way to analyse data collected (Belzile & Öberg, 2012; Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1996; Wilkinson, 2000; 2008). A more in-depth discussion of the methodological issues presented by the focus groups has been written for publication elsewhere (Pearson & Vossler, submitted).

Focus groups were selected for this part of the study because they can potentially engender a 'wider range of information, insight, and ideas' than individual interviews (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p.19). Participants had a large degree of control which enabled spontaneous ideas or unexpected findings to emerge from interactions (Grant, 2011; McParland & Flowers, 2012). Participants could question and explain themselves to each other (Morgan, 1996), 'open-up' and 'share insights' (Krueger, 1994: p. 32). The interactional element of focus groups offered the opportunity for participants to react and build upon other responses (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990), potentially facilitated recall (McParland & Flowers, 2012), and may have attracted participants who do not wish to take part in face-to-face interviews or written forms of research (Barbour, 2007).

Prior to their focus group all participants signed consent forms, were given information sheets, and completed demographic questionnaires (see Appendices 6-8). I took on the role of focus group moderator and used a schedule to guide the discussion (see Appendix 9). This covered three main topics – attitudes, understandings, and experiences of working with LGB couples. The topics were explored through questions about LGB couple relationships, issues facing LGB couples, counsellor training needs, disclosure of counsellor sexuality, and narratives of counsellor experiences. All focus groups lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour. The focus groups were recorded and I transcribed all data.

Having delineated the fieldwork and methods completed in the TTC study, the following section is on the role of field notes.

3.6 Field Notes

Throughout data collection I recorded field notes and reflections on LGB couple relationship dynamics, body language, and presentation. Field notes were written up after each stage of the fieldwork to record my thoughts and musing on the data at each stage, and these helped provide

‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) and enhanced interview data. Making field notes allowed me to record first-hand the interactions taking place between participants that may not necessarily have been captured by recording and transcribing the interviews (Cotton, Stokes & Cotton, 2010). They enabled insight into the interactions of the LGB couples and counsellors, captured information on context/processes, and informed me of the influence of the physical environment (Iacono, Brown & Holtham, 2009). Field notes also aided in the identification of differences and incongruence in what the participants were saying and doing (Mulhall, 2003). The process of making field notes facilitated reflexive practice, as I was able to analyse my personal position and how this might potentially (re)produce and represent subjectivities, knowledge, and experience (Hollway, 1989; Lewis, 2009). This aimed to avoid privileging my own experiences, and therefore, effectively silencing the participant voices (Finlay, 2002). Engaging in reflexive practice throughout the research enabled me to situate myself within the research context and to comprehend my standpoint which served to inform data analysis.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis is not a discrete stage in the research but an ongoing iterative process throughout fieldwork, analysing, and writing up (Merrill & West, 2009). Data in the TTC study were analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA) which seeks to identify, interrogate, and report patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

TA was chosen for its flexibility (Braun & Clark, 2006) enabling my analysis to be informed by theorising on the ‘practices’ approach of the TTC study (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Morgan, 1996; Smart, 2007) and my social constructionist epistemological standpoint (Ponterotto, 2005; Timulak, 2014). The purpose of analysis was to access and interpret the deeper meanings and assumptions underpinning participants’ responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This allowed interrogation of the ways meanings and experiences of relationships were shaped by the contexts outlined in Chapter

1. In doing so, this meant that themes could be strongly linked to the data rather than driven by the researcher's preconceived ideas or theoretical notions (Patton, 1990).

The analytical process followed the six steps in the model of thematic analysis detailed by Braun and Clarke (2006). These are: 1) familiarising yourself with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes and 6) producing the report. I familiarised myself with the data by conducting the fieldwork, transcribing the data generated, and by reading and re-reading transcripts. Following this, steps 2 and 3 were condensed into one larger step which allowed me to code data and develop analytical themes within NVivo (Welsh, 2002). The process of 'memoing' throughout analysis enabled theme development, theory building, and interrogation of the links between themes (Welsh, 2002). A coding framework was developed, and reworked, permitting deeper analysis and more conceptual themes to emerge as the analysis progressed (See Appendix 10 for final coding framework). Steps 4, 5, and 6 were then conducted using both NVivo search tools and manually reviewing themes and coded extracts (Welsh, 2002). Analysis was an iterative process which began during fieldwork and continued through writing field notes and transcribing data, before coding, and developing, and re-developing themes. I recognise that I played an active role in the process of searching for and identifying themes. As Taylor and Ussher (2001) argue, themes reside in our heads, in the way we read, understand, and make links to the data. As a consequence, it is virtually impossible to simply 'give voice' to the participants (Fine, 2002). My standpoint (discussed in Chapter 1) means I have brought certain assumptions and opinions to the research, and as such I recognise my role in co-constructing the narratives herein (Ponterotto, 2005; Timulak, 2014) in terms of the questions asked and the data and analysis produced (Kanuha, 2000).

The final section of this chapter focuses on the ethical procedures adhered to throughout the TTC study.

3.8 Ethics

The TTC study received ethical approval from the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and the 'Statement of Ethical Practice' issued by the British Sociological Association (BSA, 2002) was followed throughout. This ensured sensitivity to participant comfort levels and well-being. All participants were required to give informed consent, were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and given the right to withdraw at any time. Any personally identifying information in transcripts was replaced with generic terms which functioned to preserve anonymity but ensures the account remains meaningful. All PCs, laptops, and electronic storage devices used to either store or transport data for this project were encrypted using password protection and personal information on all participants was stored in a secure environment, separate to any data collected. As fieldwork involved going into participants' homes, I ensured my own safety by using a buddy system with another PhD student. This meant checking in before and after interviews. Following completion of fieldwork, all participants were debriefed (see Appendix 5) which included further information relating to ethical considerations and procedures.

There remained several ethical issues which needed to be considered throughout the research process. I recognise that studying couple relationships raised particular issues around disclosure as participants were disclosing information about their private feelings as individuals and as a partner (Gabb, 2010b). The nature of the methods had the potential to place me in a position of power, which I worked to minimise by giving participants control over disclosure (Harvey, 2011). There was the possibility for revealing sensitive information that may have caused participant distress (Meth, 2003). Throughout fieldwork, I was attentive to participant comfort levels, and where I felt participants were feeling distressed gave them the option to stop or move on from the particularly distressing disclosures. Informed consent was negotiated on a continual basis with the LGB couples (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002) and the limitations of confidentiality agreements

were made clear. All participants were directed to further sources of support in case unexpected feelings resulted from participation. This included putting measures in place for participants to discuss these matters with my supervisors and providing information links to a range of relationship support available in the UK. Relate counsellors were instructed to follow their supervision protocol.

There were implications for guaranteeing the confidentiality and anonymity of the individual and couple interview data. Participants were informed that their individual data would be held in strict confidence which alleviated worries which may have been associated with participating in individual and couple interviews (Heaphy & Einarsdottir, 2012). To ensure the utmost confidentiality and anonymity, LGB couple participants were given different pseudonyms for their individual and their couple interviews. Throughout this thesis, couple and individual data are kept separate unless any individual data were shared between partners. This process alleviates ethical issues of reconciling case studies with individual accounts, thereby avoiding recognition of participants through their narratives and preserving researcher integrity, whilst simultaneously enabling the rich and multi-layered data to be displayed (Gabb, 2010b). I recognised the potential for complex dynamics of power within the interviews between all parties involved (Heaphy & Einarsdottir, 2012), particularly the ethical implications. This included being unable to reveal any information obtained within individual interviews in the presence of the other partner. I sought to minimise any conflict of ethical agreements by highlighting the importance, as a researcher, of adhering to ethical procedure throughout fieldwork. The process of taking field notes also enabled me to reflect on the interactions and informed analytical thinking.

The final ethical issue is posed by the use of visual methods. Ethical concerns surrounding visual methods include consent, confidentiality, and anonymity (Wiles, Coffey, Robinson, & Heath, 2012; Wiles et al., 2008). The ethical decisions I made around the visual methods in this thesis were guided by my morality and ethical practice as a researcher (Wiles et al., 2008) and I opted to

protect participant anonymity and confidentiality as much as possible, which involved continually negotiating consent. For example, when asked, one couple explicitly requested that their photo collage, which included many personal pictures of themselves, their home, and their belongings, not be included in any disseminated materials from the research. Throughout the thesis any visual images are either completely anonymised or have been permitted for inclusion, with any identifying images of participants left out of the thesis completely but considered in analysis. This served to maximise ethical research practice, to respect participants and to protect identity (Gabb, 2010b).

3.9 Conclusion

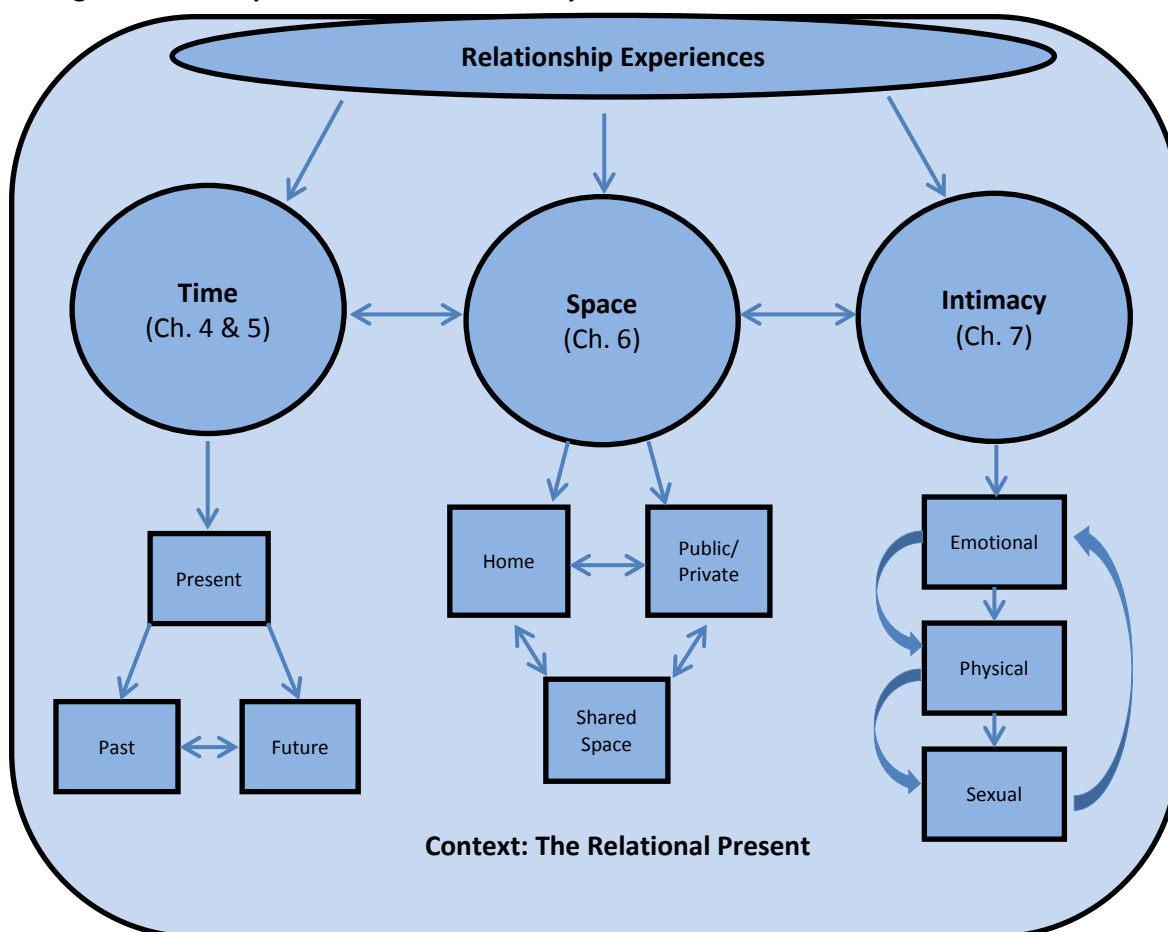
This methodology chapter has outlined the approach and design of the TTC study including information on the key studies drawn upon, the participants and their recruitment, the methods, and the procedures followed. It has provided an in-depth view of the rationale of using a multiple method approach by illuminating the value of each method individually. This enables consideration of the ways in which the methodology of the TTC study accessed multi-dimensional and dynamic accounts of the relationship experiences of LGB couples. The chapter has presented information on the data analysis process and ethical concerns and practices employed throughout. The following chapters represent my analysis of the data collected.

Chapter 4 : Time and the Relational Present

4.1 Analysis Overview

The following four chapters each focus on a specific area of analysis. The overarching theme driving the study is the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples. Analytical attention is directed towards three conceptual areas: time, space, and intimacy. I perceive these as concepts which can affect participants' relationship experiences and which couples can draw upon to negotiate and support their relationships. Situating relationship experiences are the contexts of the younger LGB couples which were outlined in Chapter 1. The analytical lens I use to explore participant relationship experiences is my notion of the 'relational present'. I introduced this concept in Chapter 1 and detail it throughout this chapter and the remainder of the thesis. Figure 4.1 provides a visual overview of the conceptual framework.

Figure 4.1 Conceptual Framework for Analysis



The conceptual discussion of time is divided into two chapters – one focusing on the present and the past (Chapter 4), and one centring on the future (Chapter 5). Space is the focus of Chapter 6, considering the home and the wider networks of relationships and community. Chapter 7 is an exploration of intimacy. Throughout analysis, areas of relationship practice are considered and I point to the biographical, socio-cultural, and temporal contexts of the participants whilst attending to the links between the conceptual areas of analysis.

4.2 Introduction: Time and the Relational Present

The concept of time is crucial to addressing the research questions of the TTC study. As discussed in Chapter 1, the relationship experiences of the younger LGB participants are embedded in biography, the cultural imaginary, and temporality, and time intersects with these in a number of ways. This chapter highlights and interrogates the multifaceted connections of time and temporality. Experiences of time include the notions of the past, present, and future, as well as differing uses and understandings of time. This section defines the concept of the ‘relational present’ which serves as the lens through which to explore the relationship experiences of the younger LGB participants. I convey how time and temporality are both a finding of the research and act as an analytical lens to examine the research questions. The chapter interrogates the intersections of the ‘relational present’ with using time as a resource for relationship experiences and support. The final section examines the effects of the past on the ‘relational present’.

Time as a concept has been written about and theorised in many different scientific fields including philosophy, physics, phenomenology, psychology, and sociology (Dowden, 2014). Each discipline has its own understanding of time (Bergmann, 1992) with conceptualisations typically falling into one of two categories – objective time or subjective time (Dowden, 2014; Kelly, 2008). Objective time often refers to measured time or world time and is mainly the domain of the natural sciences, and subjective time typically denotes time which is perceived and experienced by individuals and society, and is mainly the domain of the social sciences (Bergmann, 1992). Time

is not as simple as discrete demarcated categories. There are numerous ways time can be understood whereby objective and subjective time are experienced simultaneously, and many variations of time exist within and between these (Bergmann, 1992; Kelly, 2008). For example, subjective time can consist of ideas including social time, psychological time, and inner time, and objective time affects the socio-temporal structure of everyday lives (Hodson & Vanini, 2007; Ryan, 2005). This is important because the relationship experiences of participants within the TTC study displayed how they were influenced by and embedded in both types of time.

There are many conceptualisations of time as temporally structured due to the assumption that time is linear and 'flows' through temporal horizons of the past, present, and future (Dowden, 2014). Examining time as a linear flow ignores the complex relationships that occur through remembering and recreating from the past and projecting and imagining the future (Cabillas, 2014; Carretero & Solcoff, 2012). These serve to inform how individuals weave together biographical narratives and the 'reflexive project of self' (Giddens, 1991). Individual narratives of relationship experience will differ depending on the perceptions, memories, and meanings attached to them (Gauntlett, 2008; Smart, 2007) and understandings of the past, present, and future intersect with experiences of subjective and objective time. Thus, there are elaborate connections between time and temporality which are located within wider frameworks. Time can be experienced differently across different kinds of interactions, relationships, and societies (Ryan, 2005; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013) and these intersections are instrumental when considering the 'relational present'.

My concept of the 'relational present' refers to where participants experience their relationships and the reality of their everyday lives, develop their identities, and are influenced by their socio-cultural, biographical, and temporal contexts. It has been argued that the present moment is the orienting position of individuals through which they can remember the past and contemplate the future, as the present is where an individual can act (Muzetto, 2006; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013).

How the past and the future are viewed depends on the present moment, which changes with each lived experience and an individual's perceptions of their subjective reality (Cabillas, 2014; Kelly, 2008). The subjective reality of an individual is affected by the outside world which consists of physical time and the ways in which it can be understood and/or experienced between and within different societies (Hodson & Vanini, 2007). Therefore, the outside world represents the social, economic, historical, and political dimensions to an individual's relational present.

4.3 Time as a Resource in the Relational Present

It has been argued time is central to sociological analysis (Torre, 2007), that it is important, it matters, and therefore it should be taken into account (Adam, 1995). Time pervades everyday language and experience at many different levels and is often taken for granted (Segre, 2000; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013). Torre (2007) postulated that to explore the concept of time, it is crucial to examine meanings of time at the level of everyday language. Torre (2007) argues that discourses of time suggest time is a resource that can be 'had' and 'used': an external environment individuals must adapt to and which 'passes', or a horizon which is unattainable, unstable, and dependent on the observer, within which individuals can act with intentionality and can contemplate temporal horizons of the past and future through their present temporal position. In theorising time as a resource for LGB couples, all three of these discourses are pertinent and often occur in parallel.

Time was central to narratives within the relational present and pervaded accounts both at an implicit and explicit level. My conceptualisation of time as a resource goes beyond Torre's metaphor of time as a resource for action, further taking into account the multiple ways time is utilised through language, experiences, understandings, and socio-temporalities. This section, therefore, examines the ways in which time is a resource for relationship support, and enables couples to continue, cultivate, and maintain their relationships through using the relational present as the 'central unifying aspect of time' (Muzzetto, 2006). The following sections denote

three ways in which time can aid relationships: time as a resource for relationship work, for connection, and for autonomy. These are embedded in the everyday experiences of participant relationships, and thus are critical to addressing the second sub-question of the research. Other conceptions of time are highlighted throughout.

4.3.1 Time as a Resource for Relationship Work

Temporal ordering of everyday life is central to how individuals negotiate the world (Woodman, 2012), and therefore crucial for addressing the research questions of the TTC study. This particularly concerns the second sub-question of the research examining the everyday lives of couples. Participants demonstrated that they were part of numerous temporal orders in their relational presents, some of which were self-determined (for example, couple time), some imposed (such as work time), some signifying linear structures such as career or biography (for example, career progression) or world time, and others representing cyclical structures such as routine and mundane, everyday activities (Bergmann, 1992). These concepts were often tied into narratives around pace of life, about balancing the responsibilities of their home lives with work, their relationship, and time for themselves, hobbies/interests, and their family and friends. The focus of this section is on the ways participants spoke about the mundane aspects of their everyday lives such as their daily routines, division of labour, and work-life balances. Effective negotiation of these different aspects of time was vital relationship work where time was utilised as a resource to support relationship practices.

Frequently, couples in the study discussed their everyday lives as a complex juggling of routine and time. Conceptualisations of time regarding routines were often of experiencing time as an external environment. Work and domestic responsibilities were imposing an order onto the lives of participants to which they needed to adapt. Couples engaged in a complex synchronisation of routines in order to develop a routine enabling the most efficient use of their time. Diary data in

particular often highlighted this co-ordination where participants frequently dated diary entries and listed activities with time stamps or referred to time as a measure of their routine.

Caroline: '6am: Got up and had a shower – [Partner] made us lunch then she takes control of the bathroom mirror! As with most mornings, we leave late – [Partner] needs to get the 7.30am train to Southern City (2), so I think she missed it this morning. We should really get up earlier but I can't get my head around getting up any earlier than 6! I drive [Partner] to the station and pick her up every day.' [Diary]

Hilarie: 'Its 4.30 and time for me to get up. I have to be in work for 6.00 AM to open the shop. [Partner] also gets up with me she makes my breakfast and offers to drive me in. But I tell her to go back to bed as I know she needs to revise.' [Diary]

Both Caroline and Hilarie convey how their routines are bound by measured time. Caroline also displays how subjective ideas of time (such as 'body clock') can interplay with actual time, which can lead to potential problems with lateness. Most importantly, the extracts show participants' efforts to synchronise their routines and how they assist each other in developing a routine that works for both members of the couple. The development of these routines and support in their daily lives conveys the role time can have in the 'relationship work' (Gabb & Fink, 2015) couples do at the everyday, mundane level in their relational present. Through doing this, participants are engaging in behaviour where they invest and sacrifice their own time so their partner can keep to their schedule, through tasks such as making their partner food or driving them to work. These facets of routine within the relational present are imbued with emotional significance and represent how participants are showing and reinforcing their love and commitment to each other and to their relationship. Interestingly, because the routines are developed over time they often become taken for granted or implicit. However, there are occasions when they are made explicit.

This usually occurred when there were disruptions to daily routines and therefore, investments of time and/or energy were made salient.

Jemma: 'But like it kind of bowled me over everything that she did, like everything. She even offered to cover some of my shifts in work if I needed time, and that's crap because it was, I was doing late shifts and they are the worst ones like. She was offering after doing a full day at work to come home and go and do one of my shifts for me...I wouldn't let her do it, but she would have done it and for someone to do that, you know that they care for you a lot, they love you a lot don't you, like you don't need flowers and chocolates...but it's the real things, you know, those kind of things that you know that someone loves you and you know that you're with the right person.'

[Individual Interview]

Jemma explicitly acknowledges that investment and sacrifice of time can be a gesture of love and care. Jemma is a student and was working part-time whilst trying to revise for exams which led to quite a stressful period for the couple. In her diary Jemma even talks about the way her partner laid out her clothes ready for work the next day. The role of love and emotions turns the everyday acts of care such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, and offering to cover work shifts into acts laden with meaning (Mason, 1996; Smart, 2007). In this sense, it is the 'real things', the small acts that mean more, and are preferred, as opposed to sweeping romantic gestures (Gabb & Fink, 2015). This represents a rejection of dominant norms and ideals around love, romance, gift giving, and commercialised celebrations such as Valentine's Day (Barker, 2013). The small acts were seen as more personal and represented deep knowing and intimacy within the relationship where partners recognise each other's needs (Gabb, 2010a; Jamieson, 1998). The recognition of each other's needs represents how intimate practices, such as intimate closeness (discussed in Chapter 7), are embedded in everyday activities. This was a common narrative among participants, where time could be used as a resource to signify continued support in their everyday lives. It enables

participants to feel loved, valued, and certain of their commitment and relationship. The significance placed on these unspoken acts and displays of love and support shows that participants believe them to be extremely meaningful, and evidence of their partner's 'presence' within their relationship. This 'presence' underlines how shared time and shared space are embedded within relationship practices and relationship work.

It also displays how some participants navigated their everyday lives when there were many different pressures on their time. Amongst couples in the study, there were several occasions where one partner was willing to engage in more 'relationship work' than the other, like Jemma and her partner above. These situations were viewed as temporary and as part of supporting their partners within their relationships. Here, participants displayed subjective conceptions of time where they were willing to allow inequalities in everyday 'relationship work' to persist. Subjective definitions of 'temporary' were dependent on the specific situation and bound to different types of time (for example, exam time). Most couples saw this as the typical flow of ups and downs within relationships, tied to ideas around juggling many different temporalities, responsibilities, and pressures on their time. The balance of inequalities was perceived as eventually equalling out across their relationship over time. This awareness of the ups and downs signified how couples adopted cultural patterns of thinking about relationship practices where relationships need to be worked at and can be hard work (Gabb & Fink, 2015). This is explored in more detail in Chapter 5 through the idea of relationship longevity.

Many couples described 'relationship work' in their everyday lives as a source of tension, and it was often a place where bickering occurred. This was particularly the case around the division of labour, and occurred due to prolonged inequalities where one partner was doing more. The tension and bickering frequently operated as a way for the couple to navigate their everyday lives which was acceptable to both partners. Many couples described differences in the division of labour in their homes where one partner might be tidier or notice mess more than the other. On

these occasions, the differences occurred because of contrasting biographies and in conceptions of space within their homes. Couples typically negotiated compromises.

Bryony: 'The washing up, that's the only bit that really bothers me actually. Um, so what we've had to do is, I'll be on one week and [Partner] will be on another because I would like it done every day...but that's how it ended up with me doing it all the time because it just doesn't bother [Partner]. So I said you can do it one week and spend half of Sunday washing it if you want, and then I'll do it my way the next week. And as soon as it was [Partner]'s responsibility, it didn't bother me that it was stacking up for the week 'cos I know I don't have to do it.'

[Individual Interview]

Bryony's discussion represents one way in which partners negotiate routines into their division of labour which are bound by time (and space) in differing ways. This signifies the role of routine in conveying commitment to making their relationship work, especially when there are no external reasons for there to be an imbalance of effort to carry out the 'relationship work'. The reasons Bryony gives in her interview are biographical and are related to individual differences and their upbringings. Not all couples in the TTC study compromised around their division of labour in this way. For instance, Mona talked about how she and her partner swapped their 'roles' but it was a disaster. These findings support previous research suggesting that LGB couple are not always equal in their division of labour (Carrington, 1999) and that this requires continual negotiation (Oerton, 1997; Weeks et al, 2001). Gender did not appear to be relevant, despite a significant body of literature suggesting otherwise (Dunne, 1997; Oerton, 1997). Importantly, couples were finding ways that worked for them specifically. The mundane chores (such as the washing up, taking the bins out, cooking, preparing lunches) were seen as something that had to be done, where partners were engaging in the tasks as part of the everyday to keep their relationships working. When there are imbalances in division of labour such as Bryony's, the relationship comes

under threat because one partner is not demonstrating an investment of their time into their everyday lives, which in turn, is not displaying the unspoken ways love, care, and commitment are reinforced through mundane acts.

Investment of time in the routines and division of labour within the relational present was an important resource couples could draw on to support their relationships. This provided reassurance that each partner was both physically and emotionally *present* in the relationship and therefore devoted to continuing it. This reassurance becomes even more apparent when participants talk of phases when work and adapting to different temporal orders meant established routines were not performed. This is particularly noticeable in Beth's account of working nights.

Beth: 'I tell her I love her everyday...um, but sometimes, it can be quite difficult cos like, with the job that I do, I work really crap hours, and so if I'm on a run of nights, I'll be working a 90 hour week, so we're literally like ships that pass in the night and it's quite difficult then, you know, she finds it quite a struggle when I'm away with work...um...but again, I can only give her reassurances like over the phone, tell her I love her every day, I think that just about does it.' **[Individual Interview]**

Beth is accentuating the importance of daily routines within relationships by talking about what transpires when they are not happening in the relational present. Beth works in a highly responsible job where she often works nights and can be deeply affected by her work emotionally. This disrupts the cyclical structure of daily routines where she feels it is harder to support her partner because there is a lack of time as a resource. The daily routines or *daytime* routines are a way of allowing her and her partner to do important 'relationship work' and 'emotion work' (Hochschild, 1979; Holm et al., 2001) such as a communication (Gabb & Fink, 2015). When Beth is on night shifts, they are '*ships that pass*', with her use of this metaphor

suggesting that the couple slip away from each other in different directions. It leads her partner to feel Beth's absence rather than presence within the relationship. This suggests that not only are routines, mundane tasks, and responsibilities important in conveying love and commitment, but they allow a space for the couple to connect with each other. This connecting in the relational present can be viewed as an important intimate practice for emotional intimacy and is explored further in Chapter 7. It demonstrates how couple's intimate practices intersect with time and space. For example, Ben and his partner developed a routine of talking about their stressful days when they got home. The '*positive effect*' Ben feels talking has cultivates closeness for the couple through the relationship work embedded in this everyday act.

Beth's account, however, contrasts with Ben's. She expresses how a lack of time as a resource, leads to a lack of closeness because the small acts involved in relationship work are not happening. The constraints on time here, due to night shifts, mean the couple have to adapt to communicating via the phone, which provides enough reassurance as a short-term solution. When Beth's night shifts end and their usual daily routines recommence, her presence can be felt and seen in the relationship. There was a similar pattern with other participants where work commitments could disrupt routines of relationship work and partner presence in some way. For example, Jemma spoke of how her partner's early morning work shift routine often meant that the couple would go to bed at different times. This sometimes led to feelings of tension as Jemma struggled to feel her partner's presence within their relationship. It appears then that problems occur when routines are not *shared*. However, the disruption serves to highlight the prominence of time together for continuing relationship work. Another dimension of time might also be relevant to such accounts - relationship length. It appears that couples who had been together for less time (under three years) required more reassurance in their relationship during periods of absence than those couples who had been together longer. This could indicate that trust is still being built through crucial intimate practices for those couples in shorter relationships. Chapter 7 covers trust in more detail with respect to how it can be fostered through the couple dynamic,

intimate closeness, partner support, physical affection, and adhering to relationship rules. It epitomises how time is fundamental to understanding relationship experiences through considering how intimate practices can develop through and are embedded in everyday instances of relationship work.

Time, therefore, is a substantial resource for couples in the TTC study to develop and maintain the routines and mundane acts construed as 'relationship work'. This helps couples to feel the presence of their partner within their relationship through investment and management of time and effort where participants support their partner. Love, care, emotions, and commitment are conveyed through this investment of time in relationship work. Related to the idea of time as a resource for relationship work, and exemplified in the example above, is how time can be a resource for connection. The younger LGB couples often spoke about 'finding time' or 'making time' for each other and for other people in their lives, which facilitated support for relationships and framed relational experiences.

4.3.2 Time as a Resource for Connection

Many couples in the TTC study spoke of increasing pressure on their time resources and, in particular, displayed a desire for 'more time for meaningful things' (Parkins, 2004; Reisch, 2001). Ideas around personal time, couple time, leisure time, and free time intersect in the relational present. Participants noted there was a need to spend time doing activities they wanted to do, which they deemed to be different from the conception of time in their everyday lives.

Lindsey: 'I think personally for me, it's nice like we both finished work today, like Dana had to go into work and um, it's like that feeling of we get home and we'll have a cup of tea together, it's like that time to connect. And if you know – Dana's birthday, we're going to be away, but either before we go or after we come back, we'll have you know time – but it'll just be us and we'll just have that connection again.'

Dana: It's nice to – just to be on your own isn't it?

Lindsey: Yeah, just stop the world.

Dana: And when you make that time, you know it's time for each other, so you don't think, "Oh, I'm going to do the washing up" or whatever needs doing in the house, you just totally forget about anything like that. That's important as well isn't it, when we set times like that for celebrations or whatever, it's nice just to do that, not get caught up in the everyday – well you have to anyway, but the everyday sort of stuff.'

[Couple Interview]

Lindsey and Dana talk of the importance of couple time or time together that is different from their everyday lives. This is the time where meaningful connection happens. The purposeful nature of couple time serves as a conscious investment of time for each other and for the relationship. Lindsey's use of '*stop the world*' suggests that sometimes their responsibilities can become too much for the couple. Making time for each other allows the couple to slow down and not be busied by the everyday mundanities of their lives. It is precious time because often, and in most cases, the everyday is the dominant temporality of the relational present, where the couple feel constrained by obligatory responsibilities. Couple time enables them to prioritise their relationship. The demands of the outside world are decisively rejected so the two women can focus solely on each other's needs and their relationship which might be getting lost in the milieu of the everyday.

Participants in this study spoke about couple time as 'quality' time, adopting cultural narratives about how to *do* couple time (Gabb & Fink, 2015). The quality time, however, often intersected with and was dictated by their everyday lives. Couple time was often 'found' or 'made' depending on how busy they were in their homes, at work and with other people and/or responsibilities. It was also an opportunity for everyday activities such as meal time, having a cup of tea or coffee, or watching TV to transform into meaningful acts because this was the only 'time' the couple were

able to 'make' for each other. For example, Shane spoke with fondness of watching TV with his partner where he could 'give him a foot rub or rub his head' and Mona talked of 'laughing out loud at the Big Bang Theory' with her partner. These examples further corroborate how time can be used as a resource for connection and how this connection can be embedded in relationship practices and within the everyday. In particular, the accounts show how everyday acts can become cherished 'intimate practices' which facilitate closeness (discussed further in Chapter 7).

Interestingly, couples in this study were also differentiating between time at home and time outside of the home, where space was an important aspect of experience. Couples recognised that time together at home could be taken for granted where the 'presence' of their partner in the same shared space was often not enough to be considered 'quality' couple time. This could be when time was 'scarce' or when it was 'surplus' (Bergmann, 1992). Participants spoke about this at extremely busy times where shared routines were disrupted, and on one occasion where the couple were both unemployed and always spent time together at home, or where tasks and division of labour were prioritised.

Lucille: *'When you live with somebody, it's like you forget to make that time for them, you can be in the vicinity, but not actually spending time together, I suppose the difference now compared to previously is that our relationship is a lot more balanced, um we both work the same kind of hours... even then by the time everything's done, it's like 9 o'clock at night and it's like, aww we have got like an hour and a half before bed, it's bloody depressing.'* **[Individual Interview]**

Lucille is differentiating between having *time* together and *being* together, or sharing time and sharing space. She is talking in the context of the couple having busy working lives and responsibilities. The common thread is that participants are taking their shared time and space for granted, and therefore not consciously making the time for each other and for connection.

Lucille's partner, and their relationship, becomes part of the routine and monotony associated with the responsibilities in their everyday lives. The sharing of routines for the two women becomes a negative thing. Contrary to the examples given in the last section, where disruptions to routine can highlight the importance of the everyday for relationship work, sharing routines can *hide* the importance of the everyday for connection. The purposeful time for connection is not being managed or planned and couples are, therefore, only experiencing time together within the contexts of mundanity. Meaningful everyday acts that are 'made' into couple time, such as Lindsey's '*cup of tea together*' are remaining in the everyday and are consequently, part of the unknown and unspoken aspects of responsibility. Thus, time is used for a resource for relationship work in the context of everyday relationship practices but the relationship work associated with using time as a resource for connection is missing. This was common among couples who spoke about their uneven work-life balances. This may represent a defining feature of the socio-cultural contexts of participants where the ever-accelerating culture of contemporary society means time is viewed as a commodity, and improvements in technology ensure individuals are always connected to smartphones or computers and are therefore, vulnerable to work time encroaching on personal time (Parkins, 2004). Several participants spoke about checking emails or dealing with work phone calls whilst at home. Couple time then, is created through a conscious negotiation of everyday routines and responsibilities with work time.

Synonymous with this narrative was talk of leisure time, free time, and time out, where holidays, travelling, and time away from home and the everyday were deemed crucial as a resource for connection. On these occasions, participants associated their relational present with a fast pace of life. Managing the pressures in their lives required dealing with desires to have a feasible work-life balance, aspirations of career progression, and their future plans.

Veronica: 'Um, we have been thinking about it a bit more seriously, just because, you know, as much as we need a career and stability, actually at the same time, I want to be able to spend time with my family before they do get too old

Hayley: And enjoy life and not always be disappointed in the work and...be stressed

Veronica: It's just about getting a bit more time out before you have to get down to the nitty gritty of it I think. Um... (sighs) so yea, so we're hoping to do a bit of travelling here and there, and we have been saying it for a long time...Um...but at least we have time to think now and sit down and do some planning

Hayley: Yea, we've thought about sort of going away for a few months at a time, and then coming back and maybe working a little bit more and that way, you know the dog will be ok with someone for a couple of months.' **[Couple Interview]**

Veronica touches upon feeling pressured to settle down, which for this couple involves civil partnership, buying land, and having a family. Viewed from their relational present, achieving these future plans comes with emotional, financial, and logistical difficulties as well as strains on their available time resources. These difficulties are explored in Chapter 5 through narratives of legal recognition and family planning, and in Chapter 6 with respect to the home. Their notion of time out comes from the idea of physically and mentally removing themselves from their stressful everyday lives and worries for the future. They equate work and their home lives with constraints on their time which are externally bound to the temporal contexts surrounding the economy. These include employment options, the housing and property markets, and the cost of living. They associate less busyness with travelling and spending time with family, where they deliberately use time as a resource for connection and enjoyment. The time out allows them to spend meaningful time together to cultivate their own relationship and the relationships with other people in their lives. Using time in this way enables the couple to counteract the tensions in their relational present associated with forward thinking about the future and a mindfulness of being present in their relationship and in the lives of loved ones.

Several couples expressed this view of having time out of their everyday lives, away from their home, for each other and for other loved ones. There are important intersections here with the generational experiences of the age cohort linked to socio-cultural, political, and temporal contexts. Participants are facing more economic insecurity and more financial pressure related to employment, cost of living, and maintaining a home as well as uncertainty regarding the logistics of having children (Anderson et al., 2005; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013). Consequently, their relational present and the implications for the future are filled with uncertainty and worry, particularly concerning work and financial security. Several participants in this study discussed a lack of work and career stability, and student participants were not sure what they were going to do once their courses had finished. Several participants were in jobs for the money rather than for long-term career progression, and two participants were unemployed. Time out interrupts the flow of mundane time (Bergmann, 1992) which represented an escape from the worries of work, and/or everyday household duties. It was a space for couples to have fun with each other and with family and friends free from the constraints on their time imposed by their everyday lives.

Participants also acknowledged time with family was important and was limited generationally with aging parents and grandparents. Carl and Vincent, for instance, spoke of how nice it was being able to spend time with both sets of their parents who are '*getting older*'. Thus, when talking of time out, participants were noting the balance required between juggling the pressures of the everyday, having time for each other and for their loved ones, all of which is bound up in the relational present and differing future expectations of time. In this sense, time was also viewed as a valuable commodity which could be cultivated for whatever purposes participants required, and was, therefore, a resource for autonomy.

4.3.3 Time as a Resource for Personal Autonomy

As well as couples in this research talking about desiring time out of their everyday lives for them as a couple, participants agreed that time out from the *relationship* was imperative. Separate time for themselves, with family members and particularly, time with friends was deemed critical. Participants recognised a need for personal autonomy within their relationships where they could pursue personal hobbies and interests, and spend time with others. Time was viewed as a resource which could facilitate personal autonomy and create a space between the individuals within the couple to maintain independence.

Hilarie: 'We always give each other space, not necessarily because they need it, or because one another needs it, but because you have got friends outside your relationship, and, um... I don't want [Partner] to ever lose contact with her friends, um and equally she doesn't want me to lose contact with mine. Um, so even if it is a night out when I'm not there, I don't expect to be there, because if she was going out with a guy, um, not necessarily that they would be there. So it's nice to give her time without the relationship, so then she can look forward to coming home, the same as, you know, I'll go out with my friends, and then look forward to coming home back to [Partner].'

[Individual Interview]

Hilarie accentuates the importance of partners having time apart in their relational present. The purpose of personal time is to have time away from the relationship, which is about having time to cultivate separate friendships, not because of a *need* for separateness, but because Hilarie believes it to be an essential time away from the relationship where both members of the couple can miss each other. It enables them to feel independent and retain an individual sense of self whilst being able to feel comfortable within their relationship. My concept of 'separate togetherness' can be applied (detailed in Chapter 7), which ensures the relationship can remain stable and based on mutual equality and reciprocity. Theorising around the 'pure relationship'

(Giddens, 1992) is relevant, where the couple are actively involved in negotiations around what they both want from the relationship to ensure the relationship is meeting their personal needs. The time apart is precious and necessary for the couple (Gabb & Fink, 2015) and touches upon cultural narratives where the couple are aiming to find a balance between their own personal independence and a couple identity based on equality (Heaphy et al., 2013; Jamieson, 1998; Miller, 2012). This was also prominent among other couples and shows how most participants are contradicting findings of fusion within LGB relationships and valuing connectedness alongside individuality (Peplau et al., 1996). Some participants, though, did display relationship practices that could be considered to be fusion. For example, Anna and Jennie, and Chris and Harry spoke of spending a considerable amount of time together.

In her account Hilarie appears to be rejecting the ideal that romantic relationships are often privileged over friendships and other relationships (Barker, 2013). This was a pattern in the data, with several couples recognising the worth of spending time on the other relationships in their lives, whether this was family, friends, colleagues, teammates, and/or pets. In this sense, couples were not living their lives in a couple 'bubble' but were affected by many other people and constraints on their time, and this pattern seemed to occur regardless of the relationship length. For example, Frankie and Jules talked of the significance of time spent with their sports team for maintaining friendships and a sense of community. Lara discussed the meaning of regularly keeping in touch with her family whilst she was away at university and cultivating relationships with her housemates. This shows how individuals situate themselves in relation to others, which increased understanding of their relationship experiences. As a consequence, and together with the burdens of the everyday, time with others, time out, and couple time are put in perspective. Their importance can be given meaning in the larger picture of the relational present because they occur less frequently, require active planning of time, and are more enjoyable than juggling responsibilities. This in turn allows the couples to appreciate the time they do spend together and to contemplate the meaningful time for connection couple time holds. Thus, time serves as a

resource for personal autonomy which enables appreciation of the way it maintains closeness in relationships.

Concurrent with this idea of time with others, is the privilege of time for oneself. Time for oneself was even more difficult to cultivate and was bound to everyday routines, and the management that couple time, leisure time, and time with others required.

Rose: *'[Partner] didn't go to choir today. I am not sure she realises how important those two hours of my week are. They are my time to not have to do anything. No one can ask me to do anything & I've let myself accept them as indulgence hours.'*

[Diary]

Rose is referring to the ways in which a relationship can constitute pressure. During her individual interview Rose communicated feelings of conflict regarding this diary entry and therefore conveys the ways in which managing time within the couple relationship can be difficult. As demonstrated in the everyday with Beth, who felt constrained by time, Rose manages to find two hours in the week where she can have time for herself. This is something she almost feels guilty for carving out because she effectively presses pause on her world, her responsibilities, and her relationship to relax and pursue her own interests and hobbies. The mundanities of the division of labour and work/life balance in the everyday intersect with the ideas that couple time, personal time, leisure time, and time out/apart are qualitatively different. Time is treasured by participants where individuals can have the time (and space) necessary to meet their individual needs for independence away from the stress associated with the everyday. The 'presence' of Rose's partner actually causes tension because there is a need to find a delicate balance within the relational present. Time is viewed as a precious resource where participants are attempting to have enough time for the everyday tasks and responsibilities but also for the couple, and for personal time away from the everyday and from the relationship.

Participants within the TTC study are therefore demonstrating how managing and balancing time can be challenging, contextually dependent on circumstance, and a juggling contest which can cause conflict⁴. Thus far, this chapter has demonstrated how difficulties concern time in the relational present, and indicated that the relational present can be affected by future goals. Many participants similarly spoke about how the past impacted the relational present. This appeared to be most salient in areas of conflict and becomes the focus of the final section in this chapter.

4.4 The Power of the Past

Muzzetto (2006) describes how every lived experience refers back to previous experiences and every experience takes meaning from past experiences that relate to it. For many participants, parents' relationships, previous relationships, and past occurrences in their current relationships informed their understanding of experiences in the relational present. As such, past experiences served as 'biographical anchors' (Heaphy et al., 2013) to inform ways of relating. This concerned many aspects of relationship practice including division of labour, relationship rules, and intimacy. The most noticeable aspect of narratives surrounding the past, however, focused on the ways in which behaviour in current relationships was different from past behaviours in previous relationships or from parents' relationships. The intersections concern conflict, that is, ideal ways of managing, resolving, or avoiding conflict within their current relationship through understanding and cultivating their own sense of 'doing' relationships and making their relationships work. This is done through negotiating couple boundaries and developing couple and relational 'scripts' through couple interactions (Heaphy & Einarsdottir, 2012; Heaphy et al., 2013), as well as drawing from influential 'relational ideologies' (Ringer, 2001), or 'framing rules' (Hochschild, 1979) which regulated relationship practices and shaped reactions to certain situations, informing participant biographies.

⁴ This is an area which resonates with my experience of trying to maintain a monogamous relationship, keep in touch and spend time with family and friends, and have important time for myself, whilst doing a PhD. It is not always easy and can cause conflict, particularly in times of high stress and pressure.

Josh: *'I was always surrounded by different men, and lots of shouting and arguments and break ups and short relationships. And then long relationships and all sorts of things like that, moving house and stuff. Um, and I think that affected me in that I don't ever shout, for example, um, I don't like arguments...no, blazing rows, I mean I like argument as a form of discussion. Um, and I think I made a conscious effort to be different, I would like to be stable and secure and sure and not jump into things and...*

Brendan: *Whereas my, the experience I had when growing up was, kind of, entirely the opposite (laughs). My parents are going to have their 25th anniversary next year, I think that's right. Um, and they wouldn't, they wouldn't shout at each other but they would, kind of, have an argument and then sulk, and that was their way of not shouting at each other...sometimes it would be better if they did shout at each other because then they'd know how each other were feeling, rather than not talking to each other at all. Um...but yes, it's better to communicate than not communicate, and if that means shouting at each other then, then that's a resolution.'*

[Couple Interview]

The above exchange between Josh and Brendan portrays how participants can draw on experiences of their parents' relationships. It echoes findings by Heaphy et al. (2013) whereby couples are drawing on available biographies by either rejecting them as a guide to what not to do, such as Josh does, or by adopting them as behaviour that might work, like Brendan. Josh purposely manages his behaviour in the relational present to ensure he does not follow the conflict management pattern he is familiar with. There are interesting implications for relationship longevity whereby Josh equates the conflict resolution style of his mother to short and unstable relationships. His rejection of this represents how he hopes the opposite behaviour may facilitate a long-term, stable relationship. Therefore, he is able to draw on his relational

biography to craft his relational present. He can feel positive about his conflict management style which reassures him that his relationship has a future.

Brendan's response displays more ambivalence regarding his parents' relationship, where he attempts to distance himself from his parents' relational behaviour. Later in the interview he discusses a time when he shouted at Josh and they had to sit down to resolve their differences as a means of conflict management. On another occasion in the couple interview, he discusses his tendency to sulk about things before discussing them with Josh. The relational biography Brendan draws upon appears more complex. His parents are still together which may motivate Brendan to adopt a similar conflict management style to successfully maintain his own relationship; this is particularly in light of unsuccessfully attempting to reject his parents' conflict resolution style.

There are important intersections of memory, choice, and circumstance to consider here (Heaphy et al., 2013), whereby both Josh and Brendan remember and use past experiences for different reasons to inform and understand each of their relating styles in the relational present⁵. Drawing on their parents' relationships and their own past arguments enables development of a couple script of managing conflict that suits them, in order to shape relating behaviour in the relational present (Heaphy et al., 2013). It exhibits how the past and the future can both be situated in the relational present through uptake or rejection of relational biographies and their implications for relationship longevity. This idea of relationship longevity is discussed in Chapter 5 alongside socio-cultural and temporal notions of relationships.

Participants also experienced their relational present through their own or their partner's past relationships. There were various ways in which participants understood these as impacting their current relationship or themselves (Weeks et al., 2001). These included emotional, relational,

⁵ This is something I find particularly interesting because my parents split up when I was a young child. Therefore, I feel I identify with Josh's experience as my scripts of relating might differ to those of my parents. That is, I want to ensure that my relationship is maintained for the long-term by engaging in different behaviour such as not getting married at a young age.

and/or physical dimensions to participant understanding, and involved couples negotiating their relationship boundaries and developing couple scripts for relating through interaction (Heaphy et al., 2013). Some couples experienced the physical 'presence' of previous relationships causing conflict within their current relationship, and this was often seen as an aspect of transition in their relationships. Several couples went through a process of boundary searching to find an appropriate 'place' for their ex-partner, and this was sometimes a site of tension. For example, Chris and Harry spoke about needing to '*paint Chris's ex-partner away*' once he had moved out of their flat, by redecorating (all three of them were living together); and Anna and Jennie spent a significant amount of time, within the first two years of their relationship, engaging in communication to find an appropriate 'place' for Anna's ex-partner who died. This 'presence' was felt through present lived experiences which were attached to the past such as wearing shared clothes, places they had previously visited, and having a picture of her in the house. These examples highlight how couples can be haunted by memories, meanings, and attachments (Gordon, 2011). This is investigated further in Chapter 6 where I discuss experiences of space. Although present in their relationships through memory and attachments, Chris and Harry and Anna and Jennie's conflicts regarding ex-partners were resolved through demarcating boundaries in order to maintain the couple relationship and develop a script for relating (Heaphy et al., 2013). For Jemma and her partner the tension around her ex-husband impacted her current relationship in a more tangible way.

Jemma: 'But I've just realised that I've just got to say to her, look, I'm meeting up with [Ex-Husband]. But um, now I find it more and more, that I just don't want to, and I don't feel guilty because it's up to him what he does in his life...like I say, like I didn't want to just drop someone I've been with for ten years and who's helped me out through a lot of bad stuff, um... but at the same time I think it naturally over time is going to take its natural course and it is... not in a horrible way, but it doesn't bother me if I see [Ex-Husband] from one month to the next now, whereas

at the very beginning I was like, oh my God, you know, is [Ex-Husband] all right, blah, blah. But now I'd rather just make sure I spend my time with [Partner] now... I would like for one day for it to just to completely stop and it's just me and [Partner] and that's it, because it's like another part of a relationship really, in the background, hanging around, lurking around.' **[Individual Interview]**

Jemma shows she is still trying to find an appropriate space for her ex-husband in her life and is struggling to deal with the conflict and guilt his presence causes in her current relationship. Chris and Harry, and Anna and Jennie firmly locate their previous relationships within the past; the individuals are not part of their relational present even if they do impact and/or inform certain behaviours and understandings. Jemma's account offers a window into both her past and her relational present simultaneously; the presence of her ex-husband has become unwelcome and is disrupting her relationship with her partner where important relationship work, communication, and 'couple time' are impacted upon negatively. This suggests that attachments to the past are not easily navigated and can emerge in the present in unexpected places at unanticipated times, causing a considerable amount of conflict.

The role of time is vital for two reasons. Jemma actively cultivates time as a resource by choosing to spend more time with her partner and less time and effort 'on' her ex-husband. This represents an investment in her current relationship, reassures her partner and provides another example of how time can be used as a resource for connection. She additionally allows time to take some responsibility for this conflict. The unwelcome and persistent haunting of her ex-husband will lessen where the passing of time aids her in a transition from the 'presence' being disruptive to the past relationship shaping relating behaviour. Jemma and her partner are therefore in the midst of negotiating appropriate boundaries within their relationship through this ongoing tension.

The majority of participants spoke of how past relationships affected them emotionally and relationally through their biographies (Ringer, 2001; Weeks et al., 2001). In this respect, as well as parental relationships and previous conflict within current relationships, couples within this research were drawing on past relationships as 'biographical anchors' to inform relating behaviours (Heaphy et al., 2013). For example, in his individual interview, Tim spoke of how his partner had trust issues from a previous relationship. This led to the two men having a level of openness in their relationship where they had password access to bank details, online accounts, and each other's phones. This facilitated complete trust in one another and reveals the relationship work (Hochschild, 1979) couples do to maintain connections, trust, and comfort (Holm et al., 2001). Past relationships then, were also a source of learning where participants wanted to act differently.

Justine: 'And so yea, I've learnt from her past relationships, and I also think that you learn a lot about how people are about life and what they find acceptable, and through every new relationship, whether that's with a man, you just learn. In theory, it should make your next one better, 'cos you've learnt yet another bit more about what you find acceptable and which bits you compromise on because not everybody has everything. So, as you go through your relationships, this person has this bit and you go for that next time, well that bit, if my next boyfriend or girlfriend doesn't have that, that would be great, 'cos I don't like that. In theory, relationships should be getting better and better.' **[Individual Interview]**

Justine recognises how past relationships can be a life lesson which inform identity and ways of relating in the relational present, and therefore contribute to relational biographies (Heaphy et al., 2013) and relational ideologies (Ringer, 2001). In her interview, Justine spoke of a desire to learn about her partner's past relationships and a curiosity to explore her partner's bisexual identity, which was different from her own lesbian identity. By learning about her partner's

previous relationships, and in particular, conflict surrounding the lack of attention from her partner's ex-boyfriend, it enabled Justine to ensure that within this relationship she did not repeat the behaviour of her partner's ex-boyfriend. This is an example of drawing on a past relationship to learn lessons to bring forward into the current relationship, by understanding both of their desired ways of relating (Heaphy et al., 2013). This enabled Justine and her partner to negotiate appropriate boundaries within their relationship based on the interplay of past relationships and their own identities (Ringer, 2001; Weeks et al., 2001).

However, in the narrative above Justine alludes to a broader recognition of the role of past relationships. Her use of '*in theory*' suggests that even though there is an option to improve upon past relationships, it does not always happen, which may be due to the distinctive relational dynamics created within each different relationship. Even if there is a desire to learn from the past and change certain behaviours, it might not always be feasible. For example, Remy and Kristoff attended couple counselling to bridge differences in conflict management tied to their upbringings. Although the couple counselling was deemed extremely successful and they were able to effectively negotiate their communication differences, the couple spoke about how, during times of high stress, they returned to old problematic behaviours. This reiterates my earlier point about how lack of time indicates an absence of resource to support the relationship. It also conveys how relationships involve active management of difficulties and take work to be sustained, and evidences one issue that couples might bring to counselling. This is returned to in Chapter 6 where I discuss relationship support.

Relational biographies are complex in how they impact upon participants' ways of relating in their current relationships. Some behaviour can be difficult to change as it is engrained in personality, identity, socialisation, relational biographies, scripts, and familiarity (Heaphy et al., 2013). The behaviour requires active management to change and a continual investment of time and effort to achieve this. Participants within this research thus draw from the past in different ways, for

different reasons to reach different resolutions. Their past experiences anchor and/or inform relationship ideologies and behaviours but are not the sole resource participants are using. Participants are weaving together a narrative of the relational present which is informed by the past, the relationship experiences of the couple, the dynamic configurations of participants' relating selves (for example, the 'bits' they are willing to compromise on), and their aspirations and plans for the future. In this sense, there are intersections with identity, memory, choice, and circumstance where each participant's relationship experiences and practices are diverse, individual, and embedded in context.

This embeddedness can be seen in Justine's dialogue around relationships improving, and 'next time' where she points to a facet of the socio-temporal context in which her narrative is rooted (Anderson et al., 2005; Hodson & Vanini, 2007). By talking of continuing through relationships in this way, Justine acknowledges the possibilities that couples in the UK might have several long-term relationships in their lifetime. Her account reflects a wider pattern in the data whereby participants acknowledged the fragility of contemporary relationships and displayed a view of relationships having the potential to end (Giddens, 1991; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013). These were often related to ideals of staying happy in a relationship and of future possibilities, as explored in the next chapter.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have conveyed how time can be construed, used, and experienced in many different ways. For participants in the TTC study time can be seen to aid and to impact upon relationships. By examining the relational presents of the couples, I have demonstrated how they are using time as a resource for relationship support in a number of ways. Couples use their everyday routines to convey implicit confirmations of love, support, and care. They utilise time as a resource, making meaningful time for each other, themselves, other people, and also time out to facilitate connection which is different from the everyday. Time is also used to have space away

from the relationship where individuals can develop and retain a sense of personal autonomy. When couples encounter areas of tension within their relational present experiences, they take the time to bridge their differences or perceive the difficulties as temporary. At these times younger LGB couples are able to draw on the past as a resource to understand how conflict has shaped their individual biography and relating practices, which enables development of couple scripts and increased understanding of each other.

The temporal horizons of the past and future are viewed through and understood within the relational present, and are often experienced through differing conceptions of time. Chapter 5 aims to extend this understanding by exploring the ways in which participants were orienting themselves towards the future within their relational present and how future time could also be construed as a resource to support relationships.

Chapter 5 : Time – The Relationship Future

5.1 Introduction

All the couples in the TTC study spoke of a future together, displaying how relationships involve a shared past, the present day, and an imagined future (Gabb & Fink, 2015). The future was anticipated, where couples talked about their hopes and fears (Bergmann, 1992). Participants spoke about the many exciting possibilities for their futures which frequently included civil partnership or marriage, travelling/holidays, achieving career aspirations, having children, taking in pets, and buying homes and/or land. Some couples were already in civil partnerships, some had already bought their homes or were in the process of doing so, and some were actively planning and enquiring about having children. These contrasting plans meant different things to couples depending on situational factors such as age, relationship status, and the associated meanings attached to them. The main point is that couples were co-ordinating their futures together in the relational present, which enabled them to use the future as a resource to understand their relationships as long-term through creating projects and trajectories (Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013). This allowed couples to sustain their relationships in the relational present and to convey the level of their commitment to the relationship for the future. In this chapter I interrogate the ways in which couples' notions of the future affected their relationship experiences in the relational present. This begins with exploring participant conceptions of long-term and happy relationships, addressing the first sub-question of the research. The meanings and experiences of civil partnership and marriage, and discussions about children, parenthood, and family planning are subsequently considered. These were areas which could be viewed as celebrations of LGB couple relationships, but were not without their trials or tribulations for participants.

5.2 Relationship Longevity

A central part of being able to plan or envision their futures together was how couples were defining themselves as in a long-term relationship. There was a purposeful intention to maintain

their relationships for the future with participants using phrases such as *'forever'* (Maddie), *'til one of us pops our clogs'* (Lindsay), and *'a measure of commitment together'* (Oliver). There tended to be interactions with definitions of 'long-term' based on the individual contexts of participants. It seemed younger participants and couples who had not been together for as long, defined their 'long-term' relationships as intention for a shared future. Couples who had been together longer (typically over 5 years) defined 'long-term' in relation to the length of time that had passed, and these couples tended to be slightly older participants. Despite contextual differences in definitions of long-term, a prominent aspect of being in a long-term relationship was having a future together. This illustrates how the future was used as resource to sustain the relational present.

Liam: 'I realise that life is more important than going out to the pub you know, every night. There are bigger things at work...we have a cultural value, change is good, progress is change, moving forward is always good. But when we apply that to relationships we kind of put the end of relationships on good terms by always saying change is good. You know it's always like well if you know, it's a good thing we are breaking up, I can move on with someone more appropriate to me and these sorts of things...they [Chinese cross-cultural psychologists] don't see change as good, they see continuity as good. And I'm trying to view my relationship with [Partner] more in those terms because if you try to view relationships in an economic sense like transactional models of relationships you're only ever looking at right now...But I think the continuity model is a lot better where you have to understand that it's not about right now... This is the long-term orientation you have to see relationships in...'

[Individual Interview]

Liam's description of continuity and perceiving his relationship as long-term explicitly demonstrates how some participants are using the future and definitions of being in a long-term

relationship to maintain them in their relational present. Like most of the participants in the TTC study, Liam recognises a relationship is full of ups and downs and shifts in equality and power where the relationship is going to require work. This was exemplified in the previous chapter where couples allowed inequalities to persist for temporary periods. Thus, Liam acknowledges the benefits of using time as a resource, and rejecting the socio-cultural Westernised notion of change as positive (which is equated to short-term relationships) enables him to overlook any tension in the relational present and to negate any thoughts of finding someone 'more appropriate'. His relationship is not under threat because Liam is using cognitive and behavioural maintenance mechanisms to sustain it (Miller, 2012). He displays an 'inattention to alternatives' (Miller, 2008) where his contentment in the relationship and his view of the future helps him discard thoughts about how well he could be doing in another relationship (Miller, 2012). He also shows a 'willingness to sacrifice' certain activities in order to promote the well-being of the relationship (Impett & Gordon, 2008).

Other participants revealed similar ways of thinking to orient themselves towards a successful long-term relationship. On these occasions older LGB couples became role models for participants. The relationship future collages created by couples together illuminated this in particular (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 Photo Collage Images



Frankie: *'I would say that, the most important probably to me, so the growing old together, like it's, we're in it for the long run kind of thing.*

Jules: *When we get to the intimacy one [collage], one of the things we'll probably say is how much it's about physical contact so we wanted some grannies, sometimes when you see older people, like I don't know on TV or something, they're in separate chairs or they sleep in separate beds and we don't imagine that ever happening (laughs)...We kinda wanna be as wrapped around each other as we are now, when we're in our 70s.'*

[Couple Interview]

The images and the extract from Frankie and Jules' interview portray how the couple project their relationship into the future. Their desire to keep engaging in relationship practices which are important to them in their relational present affords a sense of continuity and longevity to their relationship. The acts, such as physical affection, which are sustaining closeness in their present will continue into the future and contribute to maintaining their relationship for the long-term. Kim and Emma's images echo this notion of aspiring towards being a warm, loving older couple. In their interview, they say their future consists of *'being old and laughing together'*. For Frankie and Jules they do not want the intimacy in their relationship to decrease over time, and Kim and Emma do not want their status as a younger couple to mean their relationship is viewed as transitory. Having older couples as role models helps the couples feel legitimacy in their relationships where they can reject these socio-cultural and temporal norms. The role models act as a resource the couples can draw on to support them in continually engaging in relationship practices which sustain the couple relationship. This reinforces couple stability and commitment. Likewise, it displays how participants can draw on socio-cultural and temporal influences, such as those outlined in Chapter 1 to feel legitimacy and visibility of their long-term relationships.

Some participants, however, displayed a future view of relationships as more fragile and less stable. This may reinforce socio-temporally located views of relationships, as for young people in particular, their futures are uncertain, their lives are more fluid, and their relationships need to be consciously 'worked at' (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Giddens, 1991; Ryan, 2005; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013). Some couples maintained a common sense view of relationships similar to the idea of the 'pure relationship' based on mutual disclosure and equality but where they foresee mutual separation when one of the partners fail to deliver the rewards of the relationship (Giddens, 1991). There were important intersections with happiness and commitment which appeared implicitly and explicitly in such accounts.

Isaac: 'Doing it and sticking with it and, so long as you're not immensely unhappy for a long period of time, getting through the times when you're a bit unhappy, or times when one of you makes a horrible mistake, or times when you hate your teenage children and things like that, and just going through them ...I don't have any hold-ups about, you know, um, getting a less well-paid job, because if you're happier doing it that, to me, doesn't feel like I'm being less successful. That feels like I'm being more successful, um [pause...] and picking [Partner]... and it... it is almost, in a way, picking. Um, it doesn't feel like I ended up with [Partner], um, that it just happened. I felt I made a conscious decision to let this relationship carry on.'

[Individual Interview]

Isaac suggests that the reward of the relationship is happiness, where a successful relationship and life is seen as a happy one. He links unhappiness to breaching relationship rules and to time, and further demonstrates how couples are willing to accept temporary periods of hardships as part and parcel of the work required to maintain a relationship (Gabb & Fink, 2015). There appears to be a point in the relationship where these periods of adversity become problematic and mean the relationship might end, where the work required maintaining the relationship

becomes more costly than the associated benefits of continuing it. This may support the individualisation thesis, where individuals are investing differently in relationships (Smart, 2007). The 'pure relationship' (Giddens, 1991) may also explain the ways in which participants are talking about the potential for relationships to end once they are no longer happy, particularly when appraising the uncertain futures of their lives (Reith, 2004; Ryan, 2005). Isaac can exercise choice to continue the relationship based on whether he feels happy. If he is content, he is able to easily engage in the cognitive and behavioural mechanisms for relationship maintenance (Miller, 2012).

A characterisation of this contentment is the nature of the mutuality of the acts in which happiness is embedded. The reciprocity of relationship practices binds the couple, and displays commitment to the relationship (Gabb & Fink, 2015). Many other participants exemplified this including Caroline who says her happiness '*comes from the support of [partner]*' and Carl who said that happiness is '*having someone who is there, that knows you inside out*'. Happiness then is linked to many other aspects of relationship practices such as relationship work, love, commitment, support, and intimate practices (Heaphy et al., 2013; Smart, 2007). If the relationship practices signifying contentment are not being 'done' and participants feel their needs are not being met, the stability of the relationship comes under threat.

Although it seems participants are displaying a pessimistic notion of relationships as transactions of 'happiness', they were orienting themselves towards multiple futures, possibly as a result of the uncertainty associated with the socio-cultural and temporal contexts of experience (Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013). Most participant accounts acknowledged that their relationships have the *potential* to end, rather than expressing a view that they *would* end. This is evidenced by a large majority of participants discussing the negative emotional and physical impact it would have on them if their relationships were to *actually* end. Participants talked of an inconceivable world

without their partner through quotes like *'why would I do it in any other way but with her?'* (Bryony), and *'I can't imagine my life not having her in it'* (Lucille).⁶

The notion of the 'pure relationship' (Giddens, 1991), while useful to draw upon, does not acknowledge the multi-dimensional emotional implications which impacts decisions behind couples choosing to stay together or to 'endure' their relationships (Gabb & Fink, 2015) even through periods of difficulty or inequity. Couples viewed their relationships as stronger for their shared experiences of adversity and felt like they could face anything. For example, Maddie and Sasha spoke of how money struggles had made them closer. Cameron summarises this when he says *'we've got each other, I don't worry about making through the rest of the things cos I know somehow we'll figure it out'*. This may be a characteristic of the younger sample within the TTC study displaying 'the optimism of youth' (Sherwood et al., 2014).

The reality is considerably more convoluted. As long as participants are negotiating their relationships in ways that suit them and are adapting to their relationship experiences as a couple, they are able to draw on the future as a resource to navigate conflict or periods of unhappiness within their relationships (Heaphy et al., 2013; Miller, 2012). This, in turn, enables couples to maintain the relational present and make future plans which signify this continued investment. This is a prominent part of being in a 'long-term' and 'happy' relationship and thus, this section has contributed to addressing the first sub-research question of the TTC study. Likewise, outlining the future as a resource provides insight into one of the resources which sustain and support couple relationships (the third sub-question). In relation to their futures,

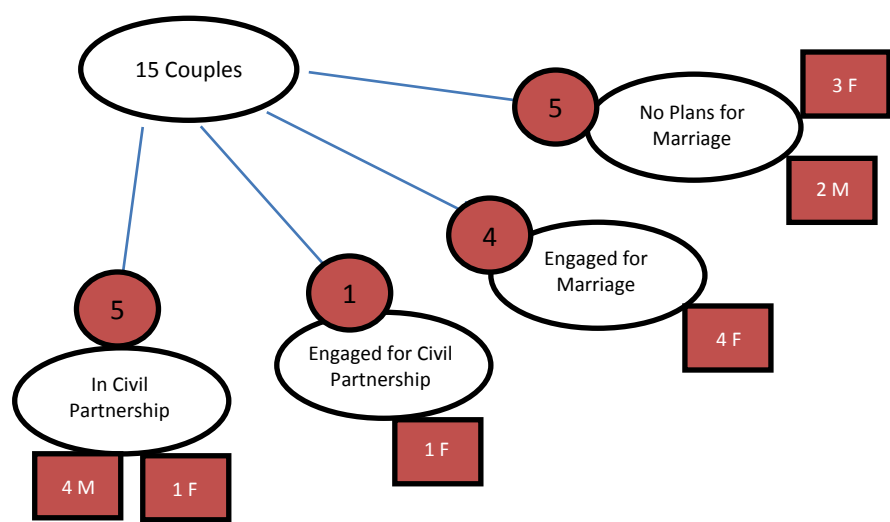
⁶ This idea of relationship longevity, and its connections with happiness, was an area which resonated with me during fieldwork and analysis, and has impacted my personal views on relationships. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, I went through a break-up during the research. The fieldwork with couples helped me understand my unhappiness towards the end of the relationship which resulted from feeling as though I was doing more relationship work and was unable to bridge the differences in our couple dynamic (see Chapter 7). The research and the break-up I went through have consolidated my thoughts about relationships. My outlook aligns with this common sense idea that relationships have the propensity to end. However, I recognise this is only a possibility, and this was something participants also communicated.

participants did this in a number of ways, such as through planning events and activities such as civil partnership or marriage.

5.3 Legal Recognition: Marriage and Civil Partnership

For couples in the TTC study, marriage and civil partnership appeared prominently in narratives of relationship experiences. The first four couples who participated in the pilot interviews did so before the same-sex marriage bill was introduced but whilst the Bill was being debated in parliament, with the remaining couples participating once the legislation had been passed. This offers a unique temporal snapshot into the attitudes and opinions of the younger LGB couples in the study due to the timeliness of the research. Figure 5.2 shows the relationship statuses of the sample in terms of civil partnership and marriage. This section explores the differing meanings and experiences of civil partnership and marriage for participants in the TTC study. This includes how marriage or civil partnership was perceived as options, how couples used civil partnership and marriage as a display of their ordinary relationships, and the role of marriage and civil partnership in the relationship practices and futures of couples.

Figure 5.2 LGB Participants Civil Partnership and Same-Sex Marriage Status



All couples in the TTC study discussed marriage as a possibility. For the couples already in civil partnerships the possibility of converting to a marriage was raised for the future, but was not seen as necessary within their relational present. For these couples, they viewed their relationships as secure and the civil partnership as having already affirmed their relationships and commitment for their shared future, echoing previous research (Heaphy et al., 2013). For two of the couples in civil partnerships, entering into a civil partnership happened more quickly than they would have liked for immigration reasons. However, alongside these motivations were narratives of love and commitment where couples thought that the timing did not matter as entering into a civil partnership was an inevitable stage or transition and represented a 'progression into maturity' (Heaphy et al., 2013, p. 90). For the female couple, the decision to enter into a civil partnership rather than wait for marriage was based on their desire to begin IVF, and therefore to legally protect their relationship and their status as equal parents. For many of the other couples, civil partnership was an option they did not want to consider for their relationship. Couples spoke about waiting for equal marriage (before its inception) or choosing marriage because couples felt assimilation where they were just like any other couple in society to be important.

Anna: 'I didn't think it was same-sex marriage, I thought it was marriage. No but people keep saying that...What, and then people say, oh gay marriage is now legal, is it gay marriage or is it marriage of gay people?

Jennie: That's a good point cos that's, yea, it's like the terminology that is used in the media and by the average person is gay marriage as if that's like a special kind of marriage, and that's the whole point, the point is that it's not a special kind of marriage, it's not a different thing...But it just feels like more of a, like it's an official recognition that...gay people are just sort of people, that gay relationships are just relationships

Anna: It's like you don't have to sit at the back of the bus.

Jennie: Exactly, yea, the back- it's the same bus, it's going to the same place, you get there just as fast but you don't wanna have to sit at the back of the bus, you wanna be able to sit where you want.'

[Couple Interview]

Anna and Jennie's exchange exemplifies the needs of the younger LGB couples in the TTC study. The couple are engaged to be married and have been discussing their future wedding. Anna challenges the discourses associated with same-sex marriage and talks of the importance of language within society. Getting married is not about their sexual identities, but about accessing the privileges available to heterosexual couples. Marriage offers Anna and Jennie the opportunity to feel as though they belong, that their relationship is accepted and normal within society; it enables the couple to feel assimilation rather than difference. They want to get married for the same or similar motives to everyone else. The reasons behind marriage are two-fold: it becomes a way for the couple to validate their relationship, and to affirm their love and commitment to each other and to the wider networks of relationships in their lives. Smart (2007) postulates that love and commitment are relational processes, and draws from research on commitment ceremonies and civil partnerships to convey how commitment can be a symbolic act for couples (Shipman & Smart, 2007). The love and commitment conveyed through marriage acts as a link to contemporary notions of relationships, and as such has political implications for the couple expressing their relationship as equal, where they have freedom from the oppression and discrimination that LGB couples experienced in the past. The future thoughts about marriage enable the couple to understand their experiences in the relational present. These associated meanings enable the couple to feel direction in their relationship, affirming their 'normal' relationship for the future and to the outside world.

Narratives of equality like Anna and Jennie's were prominent amongst participants. Couples already in civil partnerships called themselves 'married', used the terms 'husband' or 'wife' and 'wedding', echoing previous research findings on civil partnerships holding the same meaning as

marriage for some LGB couples (Bachmann, 2011). Civil partnership could affirm the commitment of the couple and enable them to feel as though significant others were involved in shaping their reality (Heaphy et al., 2013). However, many participants would talk of the differing feelings invoked with respect to civil partnership and marriage. There appeared to be inherent differences in the meaning of marriage and civil partnership which implied inequity. For example, Chloe said civil partnership *'sounds like a second prize'* and Jamie said civil partnership felt *'separate but equal'*. This implied a sense of disconnection and a lack of belonging for some couples because their relationships were seen as inferior or abnormal. In entering into a civil partnership some participants felt they were illuminating their differences. Consequently, decisions about civil partnership and marriage were dependent on the beliefs and values of the couple. These values and beliefs often dictated the meaning of legal recognition to the couple, the time frames in which couples thought marriage or civil partnership might happen (if not already in a civil partnership), and their experiences within the relational present.

Many couples spoke positively about the possibility of marriage, whether they were engaged or speaking about it in their imagined futures. However, one couple had actively decided to have a civil partnership rather than a marriage.

Kira: 'I think we just felt that it was...more appropriate for us to have a civil partnership. ...well for me in particular, the sort of whole marriage eq- um you know, gay marriage or...like gay breakfast, um, was about choice really, was about being able to have the choice to get married...we don't think, we don't think that it's a lesser... it's just being able to have the choice of doing the two things and neither of us are religious either. And um...we don't have any desire to have a religious overtone to our ceremony so it just seemed to make much more sense for us... And also for me, I think it was...slightly less bitter pill for my parents to swallow, which sounds like a really not great reason to choose to do one thing over the other but it sits much ni-

you know, my mum can talk about...civil partnership, if I say we're having a civil partnership and then we're going to have a party, she finds that exciting, if I say wedding dress...and we're getting married, she finds that much more stressful.'

[Individual Interview]

Kira shows how the meanings of civil partnership or marriage are dependent on the particular contexts of couples. Whereas couples like Anna and Jennie thought marriage enabled feelings of normalcy and ordinariness, Kira and her partner feel a civil partnership celebrates their difference without the oppression typically associated with marriage. Civil partnership is not viewed as a lesser form of legal recognition, but rather viewed positively because the couple acquire the same validation without the negative connotations which they feel are intrinsic to marriage. Aligning with Anna and Jennie's account, singling out the discourse of 'gay marriage' or 'gay breakfast' highlights difference in a negative way. Their sexual identity is not the sole defining characteristic of their identities or their relationship. The meanings of marriage and civil partnership for Kira are related to her biographical experiences, where she views civil partnership as less threatening due to its lack of heterosexual and patriarchal history and the language connotations. However, in her diary and throughout the interviews, Kira used the terms wedding dress, civil partnership and wife. This displays how the meanings of civil partnership are paralleled to meanings of marriage, and demonstrates the complexity involved in discussions of marriage and civil partnership. Kira can use language equating civil partnership to marriage to convey the importance of her relationship, which supports previous research (Goodwin & Butler, 2009). She is also using the differences to assuage her own beliefs about marriage and the ones her mother holds. It is a *choice* that the couple are able to make. As a consequence, marriage and civil partnership can be utilised in many ways for couples to convey similar and/or different meanings about the commitment and seriousness of their relationship, both in the relational present and in the future. These are embedded in the contexts of participant experiences, including the other relationships in their lives.

Whereas four couples were engaged and actively planning to marry, five couples expressed ambivalence towards marriage within their relational present. This was regularly attached to not being ready to make the commitment or it being too early in their relationship, even though marriage is something they would consider for the future. For some couples, the choice was about whether to get married at all, and this was commonly tied to discussions of what marriage signified for the relationship.

Lucille: 'Yea, um I really wanted to get married at the start, you know the first sort of 8 months of our relationship I was like yea you know I love you, you're my soul mate, I'm going to be with you forever and I do still feel that way. I do still feel that I want [Partner] to be in my life for the rest of my life, um but at the same time the emotional intensity behind it isn't as intense now as it was during the I suppose honeymoon stage of our relationship. So for me I could kind of take it or leave it in terms of marriage I think that it might add some legal aspects onto our relationship, but emotionally we have already invested so much I don't think we could invest much more than we have already done.' **[Individual Interview]**

Lucille expresses another example of how marriage can be understood by couples. In her relational present, marriage is not a priority. However, during the first year of her relationship getting married was a desired goal of the relationship. The thought of marriage at the start of the relationship allowed Lucille and her partner to feel as though their relationship was long-term, serious, and heading in a certain direction. Marriage represented a form of cementing the love and commitment she felt for her partner, and would have provided a level of additional emotional security at the early stage of her relationship. The need for marriage has subsided over her eight year relationship, wherein the passage of time has allowed her to feel secure, and to display her commitment without formalising the relationship. It is no longer a necessary step because she

feels she is doing everything she would do in a marriage anyway, and the only other benefit of marriage is legal protection and recognition which is not important to her. Here, it is imperative to consider the changing meaning of marriage within the socio-cultural context of relationships (Smart, 2007); where although same-sex marriage is now legal, it is not viewed as a necessary step by all couples and does not necessarily have the same meaning. Lucille's account elucidates how past relationship experiences are essential to consider when appraising accounts of marriage (Heaphy et al., 2013), reiterating the importance of context and the instrumental roles of the past and the future as resources which couples can draw on in their relational present.

This section discussing civil partnership and marriage illuminates how couples are embedded in a temporal context where marriage and acceptance signal triumph (Thomas, 2014), and the increasing assimilation and ordinariness of LGB couple relationships within current socio-cultural contexts (Heaphy et al., 2013; Weeks et al., 2001). Kira's account also conveys that there are still stories of rejection or marginalisation (Heaphy et al., 2013; Thomas, 2014) where some of the younger LGB couples in the TTC study experienced a lack of validation from family members. This is explored in more depth in Chapter 6. Yet, despite a few instances of invalidation from family members or friends, the majority of participants spoke of how civil partnership or marriage was something which family and friends were supportive of and played a part in. Whether participants were talking about plans they were making in their relational present, experiences brought forward from the past, or imagining future goals, their relationship experiences of marriage and civil partnership were ones which were embedded in context. As such, formalising their relationships was viewed as the meaningful step which couples were ready for (Heaphy et al., 2013) where marriage or civil partnership signified one of the goals for the relationship future.

5.4 Children, Parenthood, and Family Planning

Like marriage, another 'step' for couples to take in their relationships was having children and becoming parents. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the socio-cultural and temporal landscape of LGB

parenthood has changed over the last few decades, with older stories of impossibilities and difficulties gradually being replaced by newer opportunities and choices for becoming parents (Weeks et al., 2001). A prominent theme for the younger LGB couples in the TTC study was 'starting' a family and becoming parents. There were distinctions between already feeling as though they belonged within their respective families and communities, and becoming parents to start their own family. The former is explored in Chapter 6 where the meanings of home, space, and community are discussed. The focus here is on the latter where becoming parents was often seen as the next stage in their relationships and lives (Heaphy et al., 2013) and was frequently associated with time and space. For some couples, consideration of parenthood was far in the future, while for others it was something they were actively planning within their relational presents. This section deals with how couples in this research envisioned having, starting, or planning their own families and the ways in which time and space intersected with these. This includes logistical decisions, the emotional implications of having children, and the role of pets in family narratives.

5.4.1 Children

Although no couples in the TTC study had children, which is possibly indicative of the increasing average age of having children (Walker et al., 2010), participants openly discussed children as an option for their future. In total, there were three couples (two female and one male) in the study who expressed a conscious decision not to have children, whereas the remaining 12 couples wanted children in the future or at least entertained the idea. Three couples had taken steps to visit fertility clinics or had sought information about adoption. One female couple was in the process of obtaining consent from a known sperm donor, one female couple had been through the first round of fertility tests with the NHS, and one male couple had visited an adoption open evening. Regardless of the stage of discussions, all participants discussed children as a possibility for their lives.

Lara: 'Oh I'm definitely having children... I've always wanted children Don't quite know how it's gonna happen...but it's not something I'm thinking about the logistics of yet, but I've never questioned that aspect, I've always thought I would. Even when I was coming out I wasn't, it wasn't ever on my mind, oh, I wonder if this will affect whether I have children or not. There are so many things you can do I think it would be...I don't know, crazy to question whether that's a possibility or not...

Danni: Is it something you envision with [Partner]?

Lara: That's way in the future (laughing). I've never thought... no. And that's not a reflection on mine and [Partner]'s relationship, that is just something that it's not like me to think that far ahead. I wouldn't say no, but I'm not planning anything yet (laughing).'

[Individual Interview]

For Lara, there is no uncertainty about whether she will have children; they are unquestionably part of her future. The children she desires, however, are imagined. Accordingly, Lara can focus on the *ideal* of having children and reject any questions that may come with being part of a LGB couple having children, which may include prejudice and homophobic comments (Fitzgerald, 2010; Patterson, 2008), the problematic hurdles of logistics (Nordqvist, 2012), and the impact on her relationship and/or her identity (Gabb & Fink, 2015). This represents the socio-cultural and biographical context of Lara's experience and understanding. Lara and her partner are the youngest couple in the TTC study, have only been together a year, and are both students. She holds her student identity as more important than her lesbian identity and sees herself as no different from her peers. She grew up in an accepting environment (Clarke et al., 2010; Park et al., 2013). This allows her to project the taken for granted assumption of having children into this safe, imagined future space. This is indicative of her personality, biography, and circumstance rather than the state of her relationship. The couple are present-focused and are therefore not ready to consider, and do not have the appropriate emotional space or surroundings to consider, children within their relationship. Simultaneously, children are an imaginable and prominent part

of the future for Lara; she expresses having children as a personal goal which is not dependent on her current relationship, but is not ruling it out as a relationship ambition. The prospect is unimaginable due to the time that is in between the relational present and the future imagined space. Thus, Lara is echoing the sentiments of many participants who are orienting themselves towards multiple futures due to the uncertainties involved in the relational present. Additionally, she is implicitly acknowledging the potential of her relationship ending before she is ready to have children, supporting other participant narratives on relationship longevity outlined earlier in the chapter.

Many couples in the research had actively discussed having children, the logistical decisions and options involved, and the associated effect it might have on their relationship and future. For practical reasons, there were differences between male and female couples related to biological narratives and perceptions of the emotional impacts of options available. The female couples tended to follow two lines of inquiry for having children, those of IVF/donor conception and adoption and/or fostering. For the male couples, the situation was more complicated where some couples acknowledged the possibility of surrogacy but judged it to be an expensive and challenging option, whereas fostering and adoption seemed more appropriate and achievable. Although five male couples expressed a desire for children, discussions about children were generally seen as something that required more thought in the future. This reiterates previous research showing that young male couples tend to be more tentative when discussing children and parenthood (Heaphy et al., 2013) but that at the same time fatherhood is an option for young gay and bisexual men (Langdridge, 2013). For the seven female couples who mentioned children as a possibility, five of them actively discussed the logistics of having children, three of whom were deciding to have children in the present or the near future. Participants were engaged in a negotiation of possibilities and careful deliberation of the impact starting a family would have on their relationship and on the children. The envisioned process was seen as personal, and needed

to fit the beliefs and values of the couple and their envisioned and idealised family (Nordqvist, 2012).

In discussing and imagining children and parenthood participants frequently based their accounts on assumptions of behaviour and predictions of possible outcomes. Narratives around the logistics of having children, for both male and female couples, were associated with contention and uncertainty. This could be seen to change as their relationships progressed over time with the evolving situations of their lives. The contextual ideals and values of the couple ensured participants envisioned these options and outcomes in different ways. There were some difficult emotions, personal choices, and dynamics related to the logistics of planning for children and parenthood.

Kira: 'I've always been a bit more comfortable with fostering... and it can be long-term, it could be you know, from child to adult... there's something really indulgent about having your own children when there are lots and lots of children out there already that...really do need...care and love and attention... for me, I just, it just felt like, I know we've got wombs and I know we've got the ability to do it but we've also got the ability to do something much bigger than ourselves... We can't naturally conceive, so this is going to be a really long, probably quite painful journey, to...possibly, end up pregnant but...you know, quite easily not end up pregnant...when it just feels much more comfortable to offer someone, another, you know, a child a home that's there and it's ready and the room is there and it's ready, and we're ready.'

[Individual Interview]

For Kira, fostering a child is the most comfortable fit with her ideals and beliefs. She introduces a popular narrative among participants who spoke about adoption or fostering where there are already children who need a family in the world rather than artificially creating a new one;

adoption or fostering is perceived to be the ethical choice (Heaphy et al., 2013). There are intersections with identity, home, and space in her account whereby she feels as though fostering would have a positive effect on the child, herself, and her relationship, and also make a difference to the larger picture in society. Imagining fostering a child allows the couple to create the family they want, and that they have both the physical and emotional/relational space for. It additionally provides a family and home for a child in need, imbued with love, care and attention, and represents a space of safety and belonging (Wilson, Houmøller, & Bernays, 2012). On the other hand, the idea of using a fertility clinic involves a great deal of ambiguity which makes Kira feel anxious. She views this option as more dangerous for her well-being and her relationship. There are implications for relationship resources where, seemingly, the possibility of IVF or donor conception represents more investment of time and money, and could adversely affect her relationship due to the pressure it might put on the couple, particularly if the process is unsuccessful. IVF/donor conception might be something the couple is not prepared for, thus it may not achieve the positive effect that fostering would. In this sense, fostering is a safer choice as it would alleviate any doubt accompanying donor conception and IVF (Nordqvist, 2014).

Many participants spoke of adoption in a similar way to Kira, viewing donor conception or surrogacy as complicated and adoption as helping children find a home where they could belong. These viewpoints demonstrate how the socio-cultural and temporal context of experience can affect couples in the relational present. Fostering and adoption are now open to LGB couples, and thus the younger LGB participants are able to imagine their futures with more flexibility, as the norms and expectations around LGB parenthood are still relatively unfixed. This represents increased possibilities through which to think about parenthood and having children that were not open to LGB couples in the past (Weeks et al., 2001). These differences can even be seen within the TTC study where the oldest gay male couple, who were 36 and 37, spoke about the possibility of having their own children as a missed opportunity but thought fostering may be an option. However, the couple spoke of the importance of providing for themselves and their

extended family, which included less well-off nieces and nephews, rather than bearing any additional emotional and financial costs relating to fostering or having their own children. As a result, there was a considerable amount of diversity among couples where key circumstantial factors needed to be taken into account. Hence, children were discussed in line with participants' own beliefs about the world, about their relationship, and desires for the future but were mitigated through envisioned access to financial and cultural resources.

Some couples who did not want children also spoke about their fears of bringing children into this world for health reasons (for example, family conditions), for environmental reasons, or because of a lack of 'drive' for children. Participants were engaged in a planning process for the future where they wished to account for as much as possible. Where participants such as Kira ensured that it was about a feeling of comfort in the larger picture of society, other couples envisioned the effect it would have on their relationships and on parenthood. This was a pattern in narratives of donor conception and IVF.

Naomi: 'So we'll both be as much parents as possible, really, um, we thought about it a lot and thought about...research wise, apparently it makes no difference whether you have a known donor or an unknown donor but...I think, psychological and development wise your sense of identity develops in your teens, and with an unknown donor, you've gotta be 18, and we were just concerned that that's a long period of time potentially where you might want to know, genetically where you're from...and I don't like the idea. [Partner] doesn't like the idea cos she thinks it makes it into a bigger thing as well...but that a child can get really focused on that as well and it can create ruptures in the relationships with their parents, like with us, um, and just generally... we just need to find someone.' **[Individual Interview]**

For Naomi and her partner the negotiations around having children surrounded donor conception and whether to choose a known or an unknown sperm donor. The couple had agreed to egg-share with each other so both partners could be involved in the process of conceiving a child. This is a popular choice with many female couples and increases the sense of family and connectedness that having a child together entails (Donovan, 2000; Nordqvist, 2012). The couple plan to both carry a child (on separate occasions) where the other partner would donate eggs for conception with the same known sperm donor. The space between the couple is lessened and connectedness to each other and to the child is facilitated. Creating a family through biology and genetic links ensures there is little question about heritage (Nordqvist, 2012; Smart, 2007). The choice of a known donor for the two women is attached to the identity of the child where if the child has no questions about heritage it is presumed that parental relationships will be more secure. For Naomi and her partner, the choice of a known donor is not only about identity but about the implications of the imagined parent-child relationship. Both partners wish to minimise the potential for genetic disconnection, and conflict within the couple relationship and the parent-child relationship, thus allowing secure attachments to form.

For some female couples, the idea of a known donor was an area of contention or was not an option they discussed. It is noted that decisions around parenting are usually made between partners, but for all LGB couples the decision to become parents and create a family is reliant on a third party, and consequently, partially lies outside of the couple relationship (Luzia, 2013). This has distinctive effects on control, where although participants aimed to plan for as much as possible, some things could not be controlled (Nordqvist, 2014). This commonly played into participant discussions about logistics, with the involvement of another person in the process presenting an imagined threat to the partnership and their parenthood. For example, Sarah worried that using a known donor and her partner carrying would make her feel the child was *'theirs and not mine'*. Some female participants acknowledged other potential difficulties. For example, Veronica and Hayley talked of the difficulty of finding a donor to match Veronica's race

if Hayley were to carry the child. Leanne and Chloe talked of '*putting a pin*' in the possibility of having children due to the financial costs it involved, as they wanted to spend their money on their wedding and getting a house. This latter point is notable as the accounts of IVF from these female participants signify their greater access to financial and social resources which were not available to all participants. Thus, the accounts of IVF typically featured along traditional 'class' lines with middle class participants talking more readily about IVF being a possibility. This could be a facet of the sample in terms of both gender and class, and needs to be considered. Nonetheless, the accounts support findings from previous research where problems might occur with choosing which partner should carry a child, matching the 'race' of the sperm donor to similar characteristics of the partner who was not carrying, and the financial commitment donor conception requires (Nordqvist, 2014). There were some conflicting emotions imagined by these participants, where the couple dynamic could be disrupted by the arrival of a child. Participants were trying to make an informed decision about how best to start a family that would take into account these likely complexities⁷.

It appears that couples in the TTC study needed to feel as though they were on a level footing and played an equal part in being and becoming parents and a family. The emotional, physical, and socio-cultural dimensions of relationship experiences are imperative in considering the ramifications of unequal positions. This might include unequal power within the relationship, the tension this might cause, the negative experiences and feelings of exclusion and lack of belonging, and troubles which might be associated with biological and the non-biological parenting (Gabb, 2005a). For some couples, such as Naomi and her partner, achieving this equality involved egg-sharing, whereas for others, like Jemma, this meant avoiding donor conception entirely. Jemma spoke about wanting to adopt a child because she is worried that she would be '*jealous*' if her

⁷ On a reflective note, these accounts of family planning were extremely interesting for me because I would like to have children in the future. Thus, I found myself considering in-depth these differing situations and resulting emotions within my own life. As someone who would prefer to adopt, the accounts made me realise that there is no one way to plan for a family and no guarantees that plans will work out. Again, this reinforces the idea for me that the future is full of multiple opportunities for this young cohort.

partner carried, or that negative emotions would disrupt their couple dynamic and lead to one partner having a closer connection to the child. This worry was exemplified in one of the counsellor focus groups.

Alice: 'Well it was like with my clients, they each had given birth to a child, and my sense was so you're his mother and you're her mother. And they said no we don't see it like that, that isn't how we're choosing to live our lives...we're both shared parents. And yet the problem that they brought was the fact that when the second woman had the child, she kind of grasped him to her and wanted him for her which hadn't been their agreement...you know they'd wanted to develop a certain way of being a family which in my experience was quite unusual and they were really struggling with it.'

[Focus Group 2]

Alice recalls a female LGB couple she worked with in a counselling setting. This passage demonstrates how the cautiousness surrounding family planning can be validated. Although the couple Alice talks about make a conscious decision to be 'shared parents' who each have a child, once the envisioned situation of shared parenthood occurs it becomes full of unforeseen conflict around biology, motherhood, and connection. This represents the complications that might occur between imagined ideals of the family and parenthood, and the reality of actual family experience (Gabb, 2010a; Smart, 2007). The couple's decision to attend counselling suggests it is an issue that requires help to resolve. The implications are that the imagined future allows for probable difficulties to be discussed, but the actual reaction of any situation cannot be validated in the way Alice describes. Instead, participants are aiming to formulate ideas and decisions around their own individual beliefs and what they are comfortable with, enabling them to account for potential differences in the future. This future imagining raises worries about parenthood and children, which can be discussed in the relational present in a hypothetical manner, which is perceived as safer. This shows that couples understand the process of having a child and starting a family as

one that could be full of uncertainty, contention, and hurdles, a finding also illustrated within Nordqvist's research (2012, 2014).

However, not all participant experiences of discussing the future were viewed as positive and safer. This was most evident when one partner expressed a desire for children before the other partner was ready for them, where timelines for future imaginings of family planning contrasted, or when the couple placed different values on the available methods of having a child. This created inequality between couples which caused pressure in the relational present. Interestingly, the variations in family planning narratives between couples were typically salient in the individual interviews, especially on occasions when couples were in disagreement on having children.

Shane: 'It's something that we kind of talk about but...it gets a little bit frustrating because...I, all I'm saying is that I want kids and all he's saying is I don't really want kids, not now, not now, not now. Um...I've come to the conclusion that we're never really gonna have a family that way, um...and I'm not too bothered about adoption or anything like that you know, it's giving someone a better life really is that. We tried to...speak about surrogacy, um, but then it would cost, you know, 10 or 15 thousand pound and it's only legal in other countries so...you know, that's a bit of a barrier as well.'

[Individual Interview]

Shane exemplifies the conflict surrounding different outlooks on wanting a family and the result when expectations in time diverge. Talking about a family and having children for Shane and his partner shows how Shane feels regarding the situation, wherein he speaks of the importance of his own close-knit family upbringing. His account is full of frustration at his partner's reluctance to talk about their differences in opinion on whether they want children, the options they might want to pursue, and the time frame in terms of how long he might have to wait to start a family.

His partner is currently career-focused and feels children are in the distant future, if at all, because he feels as though his upbringing has not prepared him for fatherhood. The two men's opposing stances support research on how childhood experiences can inform decisions about gay and bisexual male fatherhood (Langdridge, 2013). His partner's lack of engagement in communication about children leads to a sense of exasperation in Shane, who feels he should probably give up thinking about having children and starting a family in the way he wants. There are implications here that continuously broaching the subject may cause considerably more tension within the relational present. Likewise, there is the worry that more serious issues might occur in the future due to the differences in time scales, where Shane might be willing to wait for a certain period of time, until his partner fulfils his career aspirations, but there is still no guarantee that the problem will be resolved. As a result, there is a worry about the outcome of the situation, whether and/or how it might be resolved. Talking about family, then, takes Shane to an uncertain space in the future where he may not have a family in the way he imagines or he may not have the relationship he has now.

For many other couples, having a family meant something other than having children. A common narrative, particularly if couples did not want children or were still uncertain about having children, concerned how pets were compared with children and included as family, and how other things outside of the family might inhabit the spaces in the relationship that children/pets would potentially occupy.

5.4.2 Pets

As demonstrated, couples in this research spoke about children in the realm of future possibility. Some participants were orienting themselves towards a family and children but other couples expressed a conscious decision to remain childless, or stated that children were not the only options for couples. Participants considered friends their family, similar to previous research on families of choice (Weeks et al., 2001), but a more noticeable pattern was how couples in this

research likened pets and animals to children and parenthood, and included them within their notions of family.

Rose: *'Um, neither of us want to have children...and we are both are kind of, of the mentality, what we could do in terms of conservation work and living our lives without worrying about every penny, because we are not ever gonna be rich... we will never be comfortable, we'll always be having to push harder and harder and harder to get the money together to do it. And again, why would we waste that money that we could put towards that having a child, or two children... But yea, I think, we've already got children, we've got a million cats...and in a few years' time we'll have a million dogs and bats, and ferrets and donkeys and all those sorts of things. We'll have lots of everything.'* **[Individual Interview]**

Rose explains the couple's decision not to have children and ties this into the women's identities. For Rose and her partner, children are a drain on available ecological and social resources and are a *'waste of money'*. This highlights the financial commitment children represent; not only would children be a continuous financial outlay, but for LGB couples they would also cost a considerable amount of money to conceive if choosing donor conception and/or IVF (Luzia, 2013). For Rose and her partner their future aligns with their individual beliefs about the world and what they want to do to help conserve the environment. At a later point in her interview, Rose discusses how she feels the world is a horrible place and she would not want to bring children into it. Sara Ruddick's (1989) work on *maternal thinking* is useful here. Rose feels the mothering virtue of 'cheerfulness', which allows a mother to protect her children, would not be possible (Rumsey, 1990). Therefore, Rose would rather not have children, partly due to her perception of the world. Her account also points to how she already feels like a mother because the couple have cats. She is already practicing 'mothering' (Ruddick, 2009) by performing the demands of love, nurturance, and training (O'Reilly, 2009). Motherhood and the concept of having children means an individual is

responsible for the care and growth of another, and these boundaries of maternal thinking can be extended beyond children (Rumsey, 1990) to other beings. Thus, the couple can look after their cats (and the subsequent animals they will have) and feel able to love and care for their pets with the same feelings of nurturing and responsibility. Pets and animals serve to facilitate social connectedness between the couple where they feel like a family (Charles & Davies, 2008). The reciprocal relationship of love, affection, and care within a parent-child relationship is also present in the pet-human relationship (Fox, 2006; Nast, 2006).

This was a common theme among participants whereby couples associated pets – particularly domestic pets such as dogs and cats – with children, using similar discourses to those employed with respect to a parent-child relationship (Gabb & Fink, 2015). Beth mentioned how she and her partner got enjoyment from the two dogs they have, which are *'like their children'*. Chris and Harry described themselves as *'Daddies'* to their cats. For other couples, pets were seen to be part of their family who they cared for, loved, and were emotionally attached to (Gabb, 2010a). Pets, then, served to bond couples through shared connections, experiences, and memories (Gabb & Fink, 2015). For a few couples in the study, pets were seen as transitional objects which could help them decide whether or not they wanted children.

Chloe: 'I'm not going to lie it doesn't particularly appeal to me. I've put more falling on the way of... you know, I don't really want kids at the moment. But then, it's like you're almost forced to think about it because...if we are going to have children, we need to start saving for it effectively pretty darned quick and deciding which way we're going to do it, because it's something you have to plan ahead for...But then, should you be having those mixed feelings if you really do want children? And then you, kind of, second guess yourself, and it's difficult. I just want to get a dog and see how that works...'

Leanne: You can't compare a dog to a child.

Chloe: Can't you? A £1,500 dog? (Laughing) almost as expensive as buying sperm.

Leanne: Yeah, Chloe, it's different. You can't compare a dog to a child. You always have to do stuff for a dog, whereas a child will grow up.

Chloe: A dog... a dog... a dog lives for 12 to 13 years, and a child lives longer so, proportionately, you have it for the same period of time.

Leanne: Yeah, but a dog's always a dog. You're always going to need to pick its crap up.

Chloe: Yeah, for, like, what, seven... five more years than you would your child before they're a teenager and it comes out of nappies (laughing).' **[Couple Interview]**

The above exchange between Leanne and Chloe demonstrates the role of pets as transitional objects whereby pets can be viewed as a method of preparing for children. Chloe sees getting a dog as preparing for children, as it would aid her in the decision about whether she could successfully be a parent and be able to provide the necessary resources a child would require. Pets and children are viewed as comparable due to the practicalities of care and dependency involved with having a dog. The pertinent factor portrayed through the interview is that, for the two women, pets and/or animals inhabit the same spaces of contention, uncertainty, and responsibility as children. Chloe also touches on how a dog might be less of a commitment or responsibility, thus displaying how pets can occupy liminal positions between 'animal' and 'human' (Fox, 2006). The dog can be simultaneously perceived as kin (or a child) and as an animal, where the boundaries between human and non-human can be fluid and socially constructed (Charles & Davies, 2008). Chloe can use a dog to rationalise and explore her decision about future commitments to pets and/or children. She therefore perceives the possibility of a dog as being a safer option, because if it does not work out, then the dog can be given up (Charles & Davies, 2008). A dog is seen as a less risky commitment, where it would be dependent on the couple for a lesser amount of time and would mean less emotional commitment and strain (Nast, 2006). Children might represent more uncertainty, particularly combined with already mixed feelings

about having children. Thus, the interchangeable notion of pets as children or as liminal objects, allows insight into the ways in which couples talk about commitment for the future.

Leanne: 'We have talked about getting a dog, but a dog is, like, a big commitment, like a child, really. The only difference is that you can't take a dog on the plane.'

Chloe: Now you're comparing dogs to children, but before, (raising voice) no, it's nothing like a child.

Leanne: No, but I meant in terms of, like, they grow up, whereas a dog, it is always dependent on you, isn't it? It's like having a child, a baby forever.

Chloe: Who's always dependent on you.

Leanne: Not in the same way, though, it's not always... it's not going to be dependent on you to feed it, to, like, do everything for it. Take it for a walk.' **[Couple Interview]**

While Chloe viewed a dog as less commitment, Leanne feels dogs represent more commitment than children as the level of dependence would be greater for a longer period of time. Leanne's concerns are about how a dog might symbolise a lifelong commitment which would place constraints on relationship resources. Having a pet would limit the mobility and freedom of the couple for a considerable amount of time in their relationship future, whereas children could travel with the couple and fit into their future more conveniently. Leanne equates children with the idea of growth. The couple will be able to adapt and change as the child grows up and becomes less dependent. The constraints of a dog are viewed as a bigger source of worry for the future, and therefore viewed as more likely to negatively impact upon the couple relationship. To link back to Chapter 4, Leanne may be worried about how a dog will negatively impact crucial time resources for time out, couple time, and personal time. The independence and flexibility cherished in their childless and dogless relational present will disappear. Consequently, the contrasting positions of Leanne and Chloe demonstrate how pets and/or children can be utilised in various ways to meet the different needs of participants.

Pets and children have similar meanings for some participants. Decisions surrounding family planning including children and/or pets, and their subsequent impact, need active preparation. Couples recognise parenthood as something they need to orient themselves towards in the relational present to achieve their future desires. This was articulated by participants along with other future wishes. Children and pets were not the only desires in the future imaginings of participants. For couples, travelling, holidays, moving abroad, and career goals were aspirations which were competing with plans for children and pets. Couples needed to feel as though they were preparing themselves for the future they wanted, where children may or may not be a part of that. Having children and/or pets was seen as something that would signify 'settling down' and would compete for couple resources alongside other aspirations (Heaphy et al., 2013). Children/pets were often seen as a trade-off for travelling, mobility, and career aspirations where *'big decisions get made that dictate your life'* (Greg) and where couples want to travel and enjoy time together *'without children or any ties'* (Jemma). The multidimensional nature of the data displays the nuanced understandings of imagined and idealised futures which are populated by children, pets, family, and other ambitions for the couples in the TTC study.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has expanded upon the idea that time is a resource by exploring how the future can be used to inform participant understandings and experiences of their relationships, within their relational presents. It was demonstrated that participants were using definitions of 'long-term' to orient themselves towards a committed and shared future which in turn enabled them to feel the relationship was working in the present, or that any difficulties could be overcome (Gabb & Fink, 2015). Ideas around role models for LGB relationships exemplified the ways couples were displaying the embeddedness of their long-term relationships in socio-cultural and temporal contexts. The legal recognition section highlighted how participants attributed diverse and varying meanings to civil partnership and marriage. It demonstrated how couples were talking about civil

partnership and/or marriage to convey a sense of the ordinariness of their relationships (Heaphy et al., 2013), to fit with their beliefs and to communicate commitment to a shared future together. In the children, parenting, and family planning section, I displayed how children and parenting can be attached to ideas of belonging, love, and care. By examining decisions around children and pets, I examined the ways in which imagined futures can be indicative of ideals and beliefs, especially when exploring logistical decisions for having children. My analysis revealed how pets can be used in different ways by participants to understand and imagine how future situations might unfold (Gabb & Fink, 2015). This future thinking facilitates understanding of relationship experiences in the relational present, which can in turn provide couples with an important resource in feeling that their relationships can be sustained.

A common theme throughout was how time and temporality can be linked to space. This was prominent when considering the imagined spaces couples project themselves into. The navigation of space in this fashion reinforced participant relationships. It is indicative of the ways in which the younger couples in the TTC study are experiencing and understanding their relationships as something they are building together. As a result, space is a concept that has many meanings for participants and can be utilised as an influential resource for couple relationships. The next chapter examines the types of spaces the younger LGB couples were inhabiting and the associated relationship experiences.

Chapter 6 : Space

6.1 Introduction

While space is commonly seen as a 'thing' and as the domain of the natural sciences and geography, an increasing amount of research in the social sciences focuses on how space can be created and can convey meaning (Freshwater, 2005; Tucker, 2011). Space is at the centre of human experience, enabling individuals to sense, understand, and construct experiences of the world (Koehler, 2014). Space can be a social phenomenon which is subject to social definitions and can be utilised by individuals (and collectives), boundaries are placed upon it, and meaning given to it (Gans, 2002; Hodson & Vanini, 2007). It can be experienced in a variety of ways and therefore is 'produced and reproduced' (Urry, 2004). In this sense, space can be transformed depending on the individuals who inhabit it and the activities occurring within it (Freshwater, 2005; Tucker, 2011).

Urry (2004) describes how there are three elements to space: spatial practices (for example, individual routines, property), representations of space (for example, knowledge and practices that organise space), and experiences of space (for example, fantasies around space). Space is inherently linked to place, where space can become a 'place' through relationships and interactions (Koehler, 2014). It can be real or physical such as a building or location, and at other times can be discursive, psychological, and/or imaginary (Morrison, Johnston & Longhurst, 2012). Subsequently, space can be attached to relationality, emotions, and meaning whereby relations and spaces between and among individuals, groups, and objects can be explored (Morrison et al., 2012). For example, 'queer space' (Bell & Binnie, 2004; Désert, 1997) describes the dedicated spaces that exist for LGBTQ people, such as gay bars and gay villages, which are linked with feelings of safety and belonging (Bettani, 2014). In terms of relationships, a space which is often associated with the couple (and family) is the home (Valentine & Hughes, 2012), which can be linked to identity, spatiality, relationality, temporality, and emotions (Gorman-Murray, 2006;

Morrison et al., 2012; Urry, 2004). For the younger LGB couples in the TTC study, the home and notions of family and friends, and the intersections with the outside world, were connected to conceptions of space. In this chapter, I consider these relations of space with respect to participant relationship experiences.

6.2 The Home

In this research participants described the home in many ways, including varying conceptions of the home as a 'space' and as couple space, domestic space, shared space, and imagined space. Such ideas of space overlapped with belonging, acceptance, and identity, and were embedded in the contexts of participants' lives. This illustrated how meanings of the home are not fixed, but multiple and dependent upon the individuals who inhabit it (Mallett, 2004; Smart, 2007). In this section I discuss participants' notions of their homes as couple space and as shared space. In the couple space section, I introduce the home as a space for the couple which can be changed and is consequently dependent on couple identity. I then present the ways in which couples talked of and 'built' their future homes which were imagined spaces and illustrative of the couple. In the shared space section, I demonstrate the effect of shared space on the home. I discuss the ways in which boundaries are managed within shared spaces whereby participants are able to negotiate having their own space as individuals and as a couple, and how shared space with others enables the home to become a space for socialisation.

6.2.1 The Home as Couple Space

The home was a central space for the relationship experiences of couples in the TTC study. Out of the 15 couples (including the individual participant), 14 were cohabiting and the one couple who were living apart spent every night together at one or the other's student house. Nine couples were in rented accommodation and six couples owned their homes. However this was not always as a couple. For example, one female participant owned the home she and her partner lived in with her father. One male participant solely owned the flat he and his partner resided in. Most of

the couples suggested that buying a house together as a couple (if this had not already been done) was an aspiration. Regardless of residential status, the shared space in which the couple dwelled was ascribed meaning and was viewed as the physical depiction of their relationship.

Lindsey: 'Probably having our own place, like our home, for us anyway, well for me, having our own place as a home. Having our own things that we've brought into the relationship, whether that's furniture or other little bits, but then also bits that we've got together with our relationship.'

[Couple Interview]

Lindsey conveys the role of the home for creating a sense of togetherness for herself and her partner. She talks of a home as a space for the couple, which to Lindsey is more than just the physical bricks and mortar of a house or the furniture within. It is a space for the relationship and the couple to reside in, and is a metaphor for intimacy (Urry, 2004). The home is where they bring their pasts and objects from their individual identities into the relationship; it is where the relationship practices of the relational present are embedded and future imaginings are developed. Lindsey recognises that their home may change over time as they add 'things' together. It is, therefore, a space for connection and intimacy, and for the couple relationship to grow (Gorman-Murray, 2006). Simultaneously, each member of the couple can retain their individuality through the ways the home houses their individual belongings. It facilitates cultivation of both individual and couple identity, enabling the couple to anchor their relationship experiences through this spatial dimension. This is inherently linked to identity, where couples choose a home that symbolises their partnership, can change with their fluid identities, and can reflect their shared life together (Gorman-Murray, 2006). The home then, signifies the couple dynamic (a concept analysed in Chapter 7) through the emotional and material dimensions attached.

Many couples in the research spoke about making the spaces they lived in their own, and ensured they made their homes as characteristic of their identities as possible. Thus, the home is a space for expression and construction of the couple. This had interconnections with age and the socio-cultural contexts of participants' lives.

Naomi: 'And me and [Partner] had a discussion where, she said, in a conversation that this is the big grown up house now, and she's gonna like, be an adult and take it seriously and not live like a student anymore and I was like, well...like the previous house, I'm like well this is my grown up house. I don't wanna be living like a student now, and...why are you thinking of it like that? Or just like, I'm surprised you're thinking of it like that cos to me, this is a grown up house, we're adults now, um...and she basically did what she was planning to do here, there. And started like...doing a bit more, I felt like prior to that, it was a bit uneven, and I was doing more than she was.'

[Individual Interview]

For Naomi, buying a house and living together with her partner epitomises part of maturing into adulthood. This maturing is linked to independence and responsibility where they no longer behave '*like students*', with the connotations placed on student living being ones of youth, immaturity, messiness, and fun. Leaving their student life behind is indicative of navigating from late adolescence or early adulthood into becoming more mature adults associated with autonomy (Markstrom, Berman, Sabino, & Turner, 1998; Silva, 2012). The home represents a rite of passage delineating an essential stage in the lives and relationship of the two women. Moving into their house together is a 'critical moment' in their relationship and in their transition into adulthood (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 21). Their grown up house is a space for their adult relationship to grow based on equality, honest communication, and respect. The space allows them to develop as individuals, for their relationship and commitment to become more serious and embedded in domesticity (Gorman-Murray, 2008b). The grown up house implies 'settling down' where the

couple recognise the responsibilities associated with maintaining their relationship, including the reciprocal nature of relationship work rooted in the home.

Many couples echoed this sentiment of living together or buying a house as signalling becoming 'grown-ups', often in relation to notions of commitment and domestic duties where age was vital. In particular, participants talked of reaching a certain age or point in time in their relationships and wanting to progress to the next 'stage' of their relationship such as getting married or having children (Heaphy et al., 2013; Mackey et al., 1997). Some couples were following norms or scripts of relating but the 'order' of them was situationally dependent on the specific couple and their available resources. This may represent how couples are being more flexible with how they follow rules around relationship commitment (Barker, 2013), probably due to the interplay of individual situations. These could include biographical factors such as access to financial and cultural resources and the constraining temporal circumstances around finances, the housing market, and employment. The meaning of buying a home asserted a 'step' in the relationship which worked to affirm commitment, similar to the meaning of children, marriage or civil partnership (Heaphy et al., 2013; Shipman & Smart, 2007). Thus, buying a home or moving in together was seen as a personal and relationship goal, and ensured a space where the couple could engage in relationship practices and identity development over time.

A few couples in the study acknowledged the possibility and consequences of not following the norms or scripts available in the same way. These couples similarly talked about the home as space for couple identity, but it was a space where they could reject the maturity associated with their identities and relationship.

Emma: 'We haven't really gone for more conventional, career choices and then on top of that, we don't plan on ever being parents...And we would like to make our home as representative of us as possible so we will do things like draw all over the bathroom

wall, like a couple of kids. You know, so there's something there that, I know for my family at least, because we will never, it could look like we will never have to grow up. Um, so I wonder, that's kind of like an indirect result of being a same-sex couple, maybe, because I suppose the likelihood of us having kids is less than a straight couple anyway

Kim: Yea, just in terms of logistics.

Emma: Yea, exactly...um, but yea just that...they don't have to recognise if and when we ever grow up. I think that's part of it.'

[Couple Interview]

Kim and Emma's narrative introduces the idea of how having a home can display couple identity to others. Their sexual identity is pertinent to the account because Kim and Emma view themselves as less likely to have children because of the logistics involved with being an LGB couple. This type of narrative was uncommon amongst couples in this study however, as displayed in Chapter 5 where the majority of couples thought having children was entirely possible. The important point, though, is how the couple's home can be perceived as a space where they can exhibit their identities and relationship to others. The couple are able to actively choose how they display their relationship (Gabb & Fink, 2015). To contextualise, Emma talks about an upbringing with traditional gender roles, sexism, and a lack of understanding regarding her sexuality. In this situation, having a home is not enough to grow up, as children are also perceived as a stage and/or part of becoming an adult. Without moving onto the next stage of their relationship as set out through pervading norms, Kim and Emma appear young and immature where they '*draw on the bathroom wall*' to express their identities and their rejection of the norms placed upon them by others. The home for Kim and Emma allowed space for their identities to be articulated to others (Sanders, 2002).

This theme was present in the accounts of some other participants, whereby having children was '*grown up*' and required a certain level of commitment and responsibility. For example, Justine

(who does not want children) revealed how inviting her friends who had children over made her feel domesticated and able to '*play with the big people now*'. There are various intersections with the home, children/parenting, and age and generation, where some of the young participants in this study believed they were still transitioning into more mature relationships. Couples wanted to enjoy making their homes a space of independence in which they could behave how they wanted, invite who they desired, and could be themselves (Gorman-Murray, 2008a). In this respect, having children was understood as 'settling down' and the last stage of maturing into the relationship. The additional responsibility of children would have a sizeable impact on the couple and their relationship practices in and around the home. The implications are that the couple would have less time and spatial resources for the relationship which they were not yet prepared to lose. This was seen in the discussions around children and pets with Leanne and Chloe in Chapter 5 and demonstrates how narratives of the home and space are also entwined with ideas of time, particularly regarding the connections between the present and the future.

Freedom to express identity could be constrained in other ways. This was particularly the case when couples discussed living together in rented accommodation where landlords had more control over the space. For some participants living together and buying a house were two very different things and denoted separate steps along the road of relationship commitment. Typically, living together was mostly done first and meant moving into rented accommodation, and this was followed, or would be followed, by buying a property together. The notion of transition becomes essential again, where living together exhibits a less serious commitment (emotional and financial) than buying a home together where the couple can test out their relationship boundaries. Both are a crucial benchmark signifying the couple taking the 'next' step in their relationship (Heaphy et al., 2013; Roseneil, 2006). Buying a property would indicate successful navigation of shared space when living together as a couple, and further commitment to the relationship and each other. There were notable distinctions between the negotiations around rented accommodation and that relating to homes couples owned. Despite rented

accommodation being subject to more constraints, many couples in the study discussed how rented space could be changed. Participants conveyed the power of the space to have meaning for the couple.

Chris: 'Painting our bedroom, and decorating our bedroom after Harry moved in, ah we needed to paint the [Ex-Partner] away.'

Harry: Yea, it was after Chris's [Ex-Partner] moved out

Chris: Yea. [Ex-Partner] wouldn't decorate this place with me, ah it is rented and perhaps there are very practical reasons to not paint and decorate where you rent, but we've been here for years and years and years. It was appropriate to decorate cos we weren't going anywhere, but [Ex-Partner] did go somewhere and Harry came in and we said not only do we wanna decorate but it still feels too much like [Ex-Partner], we need paint to get rid of the [Ex-Partner]. So...

Harry: Washed him away from the whole place

Chris: Yep, we washed him away (laughs) we painted over the cracks and we were able to make this space our own'

[Couple Interview]

Chris and Harry's exchange expresses how the home can have meaning, and how that meaning can change. Chris used to live in the same flat with his ex-partner, and there was even a period when the ex-partner still lived there when Harry moved in. They demonstrate how a space can hold an identity and can feel like a person. There is also a temporal aspect to this through memory, which is important here as significance is attached to the space and to objects built up over time (Gorman-Murray, 2008a). The space before it is changed is reminiscent of the couple dynamic of Chris and his ex-partner. The space is haunted by the memories of the past (Gordon, 2011). This shows how the home can be seen as an idyllic space where couples can project their identities, hopes, and dreams, but it can also involve more complex connotations (Robinson, 2002; Smart, 2007). The necessary action is to physically change the space, enabling the meaning

and feeling of the space to be less symbolic of Chris and his ex-partner's relationship, and for it instead to be transformed into a space of comfort for Chris and Harry. The space is purged of Chris's ex-partner where they paint over the '*cracks*' and can make new memories for their relationship. The cracks mark the negativity of Chris's past relationship and by painting over these Chris and Harry can have a blank, smooth canvas to build their own home for their relationship which is happy, secure, and evocative of them. It is interesting to note in their metaphor that the cracks are not filled or fixed but remain underneath the surface. This could portray the impact of the past on the couple's relationship experiences, and exemplifies one of the main arguments of this thesis (detailed in Chapter 4). The cracks serve as a memory of the past to inform the biography and relational story of the couple.

Several couples involved in the research talked about the meaning of home and space in this way, where memories haunted spaces. For example, in his diary Ben wrote about the effect that going to his childhood home had on him. His brother was now living there after his mother had passed away, and his experience of the space was haunted by the ghost of his mother where he envisioned her presence carrying out various activities because of the memories attached to that space. This exemplifies how emotions and memories can be held in the home and space (Morrison et al., 2012; Urry, 2004) and how loss can trouble us in unexpected places (Gordon, 2011). For Ben, and for Chris and Harry, this was based on the past meanings of the space, but for some participants the experience of the space was based on future imaginings. This was often paired with narratives of staying in the same place because of contextual circumstances. For some couples this was seen as temporary until they were in the position to buy property viewed as more appropriate. This could have been moving from renting to buying a home or moving from a smaller property to a bigger property more suitable for the couple and/or to account for future plans. A major contextual factor in these decisions was the couple's financial circumstances. Participants typically expressed their imagined future homes with a sense of ambiguity.

Vincent: 'Well that's just recently changed cos we spoke about that last Saturday cos we wanted to, we were, we kept on about wanting and wanting a house, but now we've looked into it, we've decided, what's the point of skinting ourselves, and having a house that we have to sit in every night cos we can't afford to go out or do up...whereas we can just stay here for a little bit longer, a few more years cos it's perfect here and then have money and do nice things cos we keep on about holidays and cars and stuff

Carl: You know, it's not, a house isn't off the table, you know, I want a house

Vincent: It's just taking that bit of pressure off...and we're gonna take what we've got and make it better, you know and, have money and stuff

Carl: New furniture, new sofa, tumble dryer, you know, it's nice, don't get me wrong but a little 2 seater sofa, well that's no good is it?

Vincent: Well we would be able to afford to do it if we stay here.' **[Couple Interview]**

Carl and Vincent discuss the effects of future desires on their current space. They currently live in a flat Vincent owns but they want to buy a house together. Carl has recently sold a property he owned with his ex-partner and speaks of the stress associated with selling the property and of having a bad credit rating due to financial difficulties with his ex-partner. This feeds into the decision about whether the couple should stay in their current home or buy the joint home they desire. But Carl does not think he will be able to get a mortgage. Therefore, their decision is mostly based on finances and the implication this has on space. Buying a house at the moment (if they could get a mortgage) would lead to Carl and Vincent being under more financial restrictions and mean they would be limited for activities they could do outside of the home. For example, 'time-out' away from their home such as visiting restaurants which was identified as important in the previous chapter. This constraint could potentially lead to unhappiness because of the negativity associated with the limitations it places on mobility, their access to resources such as

time for connection and personal autonomy (see Chapter 4), and the ability to support other important people in their lives.

The couple still express a desire to buy their future home at some point. This also has the possibility to lead to unhappiness for the couple, where the smaller space they live in could be haunted by the future imaginings of what buying a home together means (Gordon, 2011). Their current flat is owned by Vincent and this could have implications for the dynamics of power within their relationship. As such the situation is fairly complex. The couple are juggling the meanings of their current living space with their future imagined home, thereby evidencing the ways in which space can change (Tucker, 2011) and how experiences of space can involve fantasies (Urry, 2004). The couple talk of changing the space they live in to make it feel new and ensuring it is comfortable for them both. This is because, while emotions and meaning can be attached to space, they can also be attributed to objects (Gorman-Murray, 2008a; Morrison et al., 2012). This denotes a short-term fix for the couple which eases any pressure and expectations around buying a home together in their relational present.

The above example explicates how couples in this study are continually orienting themselves and adapting to multiple futures where timelines change for plans such as buying a house, based on contextual factors (Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013). Some of these factors are individual and some are indicative of the socio-cultural and temporal contexts mentioned in Chapter 1 (for example, economic climate, housing market). During fieldwork, one couple bought a home with the help of a loan from parents for the deposit. This highlights the difficulties associated with becoming a first-time buyer (Blackmore, 2014; Kirk, 2014), and how social capital, social networks, and 'class' might affect participant experiences of being able to buy a home (Henderson et al., 2007; Holland et al., 2007; Putnam, 2000). Participants who were middle class and/or came from more privileged backgrounds described better access to social and financial capital which aided them in buying their homes. For couples who did not have such resources, were not in the financial

position, or ready to make the commitment to buy a home together, the idea of their homes were imagined spaces of the future. Several couples talked about 'building' their future homes, or buying land to enable sustainable living, or moving to a house abroad, or of buying a house which improved on their current space in some way (like Carl and Vincent). The common narrative was how the imagined space was synonymous with couple ideals and values.

Kristoff: 'And then...um, I think that ah...buying some land and a house will help us feel more grounded, um, and...um...you know, be able to focus on, like a direction, um...

Remy: Yea we do, we want land and we got very into the tiny house movement, because we don't like being slaves to the rental market and you know, people pay like hundreds of thousands for places and we've gotten really passionate about this... but I'm going to build a house too, um, so...you know, we have this sort of idea that, you know, his mum and my father in law will be provided for, um, because we'll have them in their own tiny houses on the land and we'll have a bigger sort of place where the communal stuff happens but everyone has their own little space on the land and um...I can have my little, sort of cabin on a trailer, you know, that's my writing, thinking place.'

[Couple Interview]

Kristoff and Remy demonstrate how couples envision their future homes. For this couple their future space is about being able to feel stable in a place which asserts their identities. Having their own land enables the couple to feel anchored to a space where they feel they have a place where they belong (Urry, 2004). Their future space is one which welcomes other people into it, as through having their own land they can provide a secure place for their loved ones and ensure they have their own couple space as well as individual personal space. This displays how imagined spaces of home can be construed as spaces for socialisation, where themes of belonging, safety, and acceptance are pertinent (Gorman-Murray, 2006, 2008a). It also shows how space can be combined with time as a resource for the relationship. The future home serves as a way for the

couple to indicate commitment to a shared future. The mutual ideal ways of living for the couple additionally emphasises their relationship and compatibility with each other. This notion of compatibility is detailed in my analysis of the couple dynamic in Chapter 7.

Building their future homes typified a method of sustaining commitment for many couples, where the notion of a future home together reinforced their relationship (Gorman-Murray, 2006). The future home was a space for the relationship to grow, and ensured couples had direction for the future. This further indicates how the future can be a resource which couples draw on in the relational present, as explicated in Chapter 5 where future plans signified commitment to a shared future and to couples building a life together. The homes produced a space onto which participants could project their hopes and dreams for themselves and for their relationship. Many participants commented on a '*dream home*' (Shane) or '*dream plans*' (Jamie), and the future spaces their aspirations occupied were filled with passion where anything seemed possible. Interestingly, some participants acknowledged the imaginary space in which their dream homes were located whereas others were actively planning to achieve their imaginings. The differences were bound up in the socio-cultural and biographical contexts of the couples and were dependent on class, employment status, finances, other desires such as marriage and/or children, and sometimes other people. For example, the fact that one couple were able to borrow money from parents to buy a house.

Although this section has been about the home as a couple space, shared space is discernible throughout. This is primarily seen through couples sharing the space with each other, but participants also expressed that their homes were regularly shared with others outside the couple. This can be seen in the accounts of Chris and Harry, with Chris's ex-partner, and with Remy and Kristoff who talk about providing for their parents. This is the focus of the next section.

6.2.2 The Home as Shared Space

Thus far, I have demonstrated how participants experienced their homes as a space for the couple, but it was also often a space which was shared with others. This was frequently discussed in relation to living with other people and/or pets, and inviting people into their homes. Out of the 15 couples who lived together, two couples lived with other people or couples, and four more alluded to shared living in the future or having shared for short periods of time whilst in their current relationship. Talk about this often intersected with discussion of the boundaries of space within the home. When combined, the emotion map, diary, and individual interview data provide a multifaceted view of the spatial boundaries in these cases. This was especially useful in exploring the relationship practices of the couple and how tensions between personal space, couple space, and shared space were portrayed and negotiated.

Figure 6.1 Daniel Emotion Map

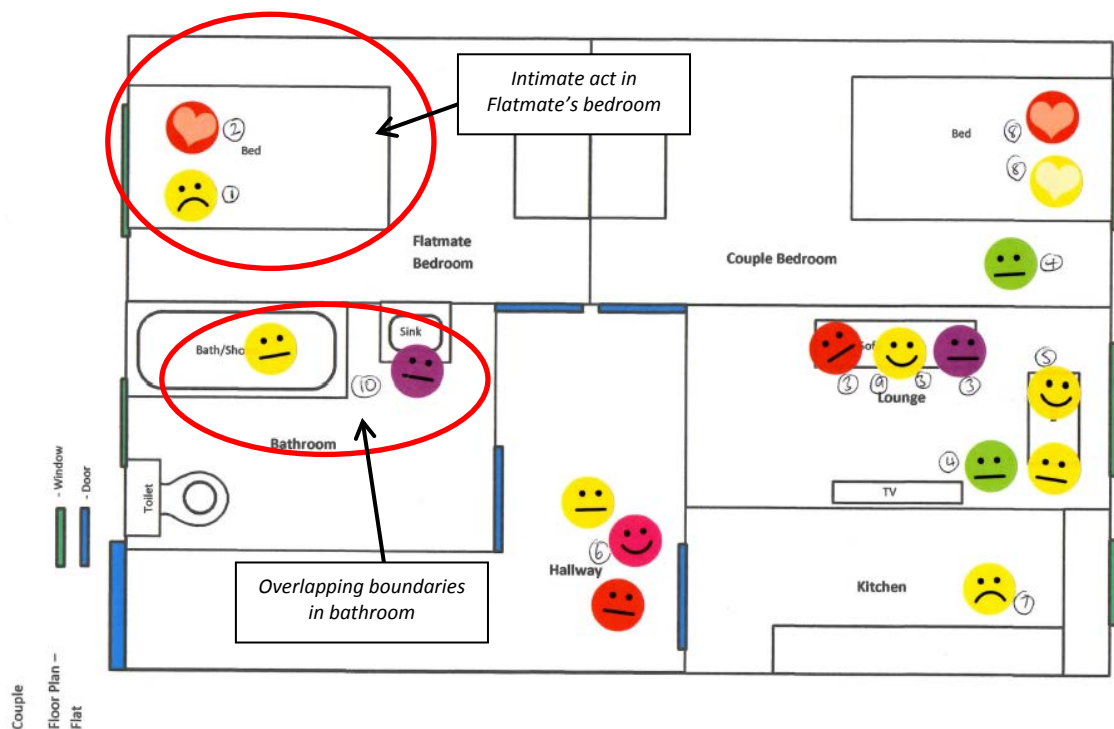


Figure 6.1 displays Daniel's emotion map. Daniel is yellow, his partner is red, and his flatmate is purple. The map allows a visual insight into the potential boundaries of the shared space where the couple are engaging in an intimate act in the flatmate's bedroom (Number 2 on the map). The

diary data illuminates the specificities of the intimacy which Daniel describes as '*oral sex*'. Together the data display the spatial dimension of intimate practices (Gabb & Fink, 2015), wherein attending to the experiences of couple space, personal space, and shared space is imperative. The emotion map raises questions about the boundaries of intimate behaviour within the shared space, where the couple are engaging in intimate practices in the personal space of their flatmate. Presumably those types of intimate acts would usually occur in the spaces in the home deemed as 'couple space' such as their own bedroom. However, it appears as though the boundaries between this couple and their flatmate are more relaxed and fluid. Daniel and his partner spend time together in the flatmate's space and are able to engage in sexual acts there. The behaviour *appears* to be acceptable, but the data do not convey the implicit or explicit nature of the relational boundaries within their home.

The individual interview allows further investigation of this, including the more nuanced experiences of the space between the couple and their flatmate.

Danni: 'There's one day when you are intimate in [Flatmate]'s room.

Daniel: (Whispers) Yea

Danni: I just wanted to ask about boundaries, does that happen often or?

Daniel: No, that was a one-off.

Danni: Okay

Daniel: I was watching the Olympic sports and [Flatmate] was in here watching something else and [Partner] came through, um cos I'd recorded it on [Flatmate]'s TV um, and I was a bit upset [Number 1 on the emotion map] and [Partner] came through to comfort me and one thing led to another (laughs)

Danni: Okay (laughs) so that's the kind of thing you wouldn't normally talk to [Partner] about?

Daniel: We wouldn't normally, no.

Danni: And would you talk to [Flatmate] about that happening?

Daniel: No.'

[Individual Interview]

In the extract above, Daniel's whispered answer and subsequent responses, as well as my reading of his body language in the interaction, enabled communication that the sexual intimacy breached the boundaries of the space the couple share with their flatmate. However, the act served to provide comfort to Daniel where the boundaries became less important than the partner support embedded in the intimacy. This demonstrates the intersections of the sexual and emotional dimensions of intimate practices where partner support is offered through physical means. These intersections of sex, emotions, and partner support are explored in Chapter 7. There is also a forbidden aspect to the intimate practice which potentially heightened the meaning and pleasure of the act, exemplifying how sex (and therefore intimate practices) is entrenched in spatial dimensions where the significance of experiences can differ (Bricknell, 2010; Mutchler, 2000). The implications are that, if discovered, it would cause considerable conflict within their home, between the couple and their housemate. The boundaries regarding sexual intimacy appear implicit, as though it is assumed the couple would not engage in sexual intimacy in the flatmate's personal space. While the space is shared with another person, the ways the space is navigated changes, where some behaviour is acceptable (for example, watching TV) and some breach the boundaries of personal, shared, and couple space. Negotiating shared space can be complex where the couple's experience of the space is constrained, and certain acts of pushing and crossing boundaries can cause tension. Sharing space then involves cooperation between self and other, and couple and other, where there is assumed reciprocal respect for all parties involved (Gabb, 2011). This demonstrates that novel interactions occur when a third party is present (Gabb & Fink, 2015), and enables insight into the everyday experiences of the relational boundaries within the home, which are multi-dimensional (Gabb, 2011), and how these may be communicated or left unspoken.

This becomes salient when looking at the relational boundaries between both members of the couple and their housemate. There are times when Daniel and his partner need/want couple space, and when both partners and their flatmate need their own personal space. Thus, it underlines how shared space is not only about the couple sharing the space with other people, as primarily couples are sharing the space with each other which also comes with associated tensions and needs for personal space. Often narratives around this intersected with those around negotiating time (like those outlined in Chapter 4). An additional party adds another dimension of spatial experiences. For Daniel, it occurs within the situational context where all three individuals are not working and spend most of their time together in the small flat they share. In this environment the couple and their flatmate are constrained by the space and struggle to navigate it (Freshwater, 2005; Urry, 2004), with this navigation being different for each person in the shared space. This can be seen when exploring the bathroom on the emotion map (number 10 in Figure 6.1).

Daniel: 'And again, like number ten where we're both in the bathroom. We don't think anything about me being in the bath and [Flatmate] coming in and using the toilet or brushing his teeth or whatever...Um, although when [Partner]'s in the bathroom, neither me or [Flatmate] will go in, we've got a boundary there but when I'm in the bathroom or [Flatmate]'s in the bathroom there's no boundaries. Whereas, but I think we were like that in our relationship, um, and we always have been where [Partner]'s quite private when he's in the bathroom so, we leave him alone and to it, we don't disturb him, um when he's in the bathroom.' **[Individual Interview]**

The boundaries of the shared space exemplify the complex relationships between the three individuals. Daniel and his flatmate have fewer boundaries sharing the bathroom than either of them has with Daniel's partner. For Daniel and his flatmate, sharing the bathroom depicts the level of intimacy within their friendship. Their history is important here, as Daniel and his flatmate

used to be in a relationship. The boundary was not present in their relationship before and, as a result, is not present now. This indicates how boundaries of intimacy can be blurred between self and other where they represent a level of comfort in everyday practices of intimate relating (Gabb, 2011). However, for Daniel's partner, the bathroom is a private space, and the boundary he places on the bathroom suggests that he perceives his physical care as a private activity which he does not wish to share with his partner or flatmate. The private space allows him to have alone time he cannot get anywhere else in the home, and might be indicative of his discomfort around having to share the space with his partner's ex-partner. This shows how individuals can use space differently and might ascribe varying, multiple meanings to it, which are contextually dependent on relationships between the individuals in the shared space (Morrison et al., 2012). It also exhibits how relationship experiences were affected by other people, and complicates previous research that typically links friendships with ex-lovers to lesbians (Weinstock, 2004).

The reasons why shared living is happening are crucial. Daniel and his partner stated that they shared their flat for financial purposes. There may be other reasons for their dynamic, where the familiarity of the flatmate enables Daniel to assuage any anxieties about his mental health or his partner's lack of UK residency, and provides Daniel with additional support for the relationship (Graham & Barnow, 2013). Some couples described sharing space for other reasons which supplied some form of support, including a combination of ideological, material, ethical, social and financial factors. Shared living was a method of accounting for future plans (Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013), indicating the role of community, family, and/or friends in supporting relationship experiences embedded in the home.

Jules: 'The shared living thing is initially a five year plan with [Housemate 3] and [Housemate 4] who we live with... they also want to start a family in the next couple of years... Um, yea so to stay living here with going through up to school age years which are really expensive for childcare, and all working part time and sharing

childcare between the two couples, so we all look after each other's kids and we don't need to pay for childcare but we can all work part time and manage the childcare.

Frankie: I really like the whole um, ethics of like, community living anyway, like I like the resource sharing and...I like the, effect on kids as well, having like several people that, like I don't really believe in the whole...kids stays with their mum constantly 24/7 and is really distressed or feels terrible whenever anything changes. And also like, they'll be pretty much like brothers and sisters. So if there's any kind of, bullying or whatever they'll, have a lot of support from each other, hopefully. And they'll have just exactly another example of another kid in the same situation... Plus it's really fun, I like it (laughs).'

[Couple Interview]

For Frankie and Jules, shared living allows the couple to provide a foundation for their relationship and a space to begin a family. The space which the couple share becomes one which facilitates family, community, and belonging (Wilson et al., 2012) and allows for different meanings of family and community to be imagined and lived (Weeks et al., 2001). The home is a physical space where couples could 'do' family (Valentine & Hughes, 2012), and there are various intersections with the socio-cultural, biographical, and temporal contexts here. The couple acknowledge the cost of childcare and also the possibility of the children being bullied for having LGB parents (Nordqvist, 2012). It further supports the idea that couples are planning for their futures, which involved carefully thinking about decisions around family planning (explored in Chapter 5). The sense of belonging, family, and community enables the couples involved to achieve the best possible environment for their children to dwell in. There are two important points here. First, the shared space facilitates future oriented plans, where the shared space is not only shared with the other couple but also with their future and imagined children. Secondly, the shared space provides the couple with the peer support, stability, and security that they want for their children and for their own relationship. As a consequence, if their arrangement of shared space is currently working, it

provides reassurances for support for parenthood and their relationship. This notion of support is returned to later in the chapter. It is believed that it will cultivate a similarly successful and nurturing environment for their children in the future. It also allows consideration of how, for some younger people, there is a greater amount of time spent living with peers which decentres the couple (Budgeon & Roseneil, 2004; Heath, 2004), signalling the importance placed on friendship and other relationships in the lives of the younger LGB couples in the TTC study.

For Frankie and Jules, shared space was an active choice where they perceived their friendships to be crucial to their own relationship experiences. For others, like Daniel and his partner, the shared living was (in)convenient because of financial (and/or emotional) constraints and attachments of the couple. For many couples, there was choice surrounding sharing their home as couple space with others. It was important to feel as though the couple home was a space of belonging, comfort, and security. As mentioned, for many couples the home was a place where they could be themselves. This was salient when inviting other people into their home such as family members, friends, or colleagues.

Bryony: 'She's never visited before and what a gesture it was to me. I visit them. I go 'home'. But I am home too and they could come to see me just as easily...It was great to be in our comfort zone and not censor the things we said; to be comfortable and unapologetic about talking about things we're interested in... The only reason these were okay things to say so casually was it was my mom on her own and because there was a feeling of being on our own turf. I hadn't felt it so strongly before. But this is my home and outside influences are not as strong here. I'm not in my parents' house...We can be as unconventional as we like. No apologies for being vegetarian conservationists, feminists, informed and ethical consumers, (gay?). But I don't notice being gay here.'

[Diary]

Bryony acknowledges the power of her home as a space in which she can express her identity. The meaning of the space for Bryony is rooted in her biography, particularly considering the spatial dimensions of her upbringing and the influence of her father. She associates her parents' home and the country she comes from with oppression, traditional familial and gender roles, and homophobia. This signifies how the home can be a place of negative experiences, especially for LGB individuals (Valentine, 1993; Valentine et al., 2003; Weeks et al., 2001). In her individual interview she discussed dinner time in her parents' home where conversation was directed by her father and she only spoke when she was addressed. Her home with her partner is a space of safety, where she can be herself without fear of negative consequences for being different or not following the rules, and this realisation comes from sharing the space with her mother. Her mother's presence in Bryony's home illuminates the disparities between her childhood (parents') home and the one she has created with her partner. Her interactions with her mother are different due to the contrasting meaning of the space which is instilled with her relationship practices, values, and beliefs. This reiterates the feeling of belonging and safety she obtains from her home, as well as displaying how relationality can affect people's experiences of spaces (Gorman-Murray, 2008a; Morrison et al., 2012). The safe space of her home is one that cannot be easily penetrated by negativity or disapproval, and as a result Bryony notes that she does not notice being gay in her home.

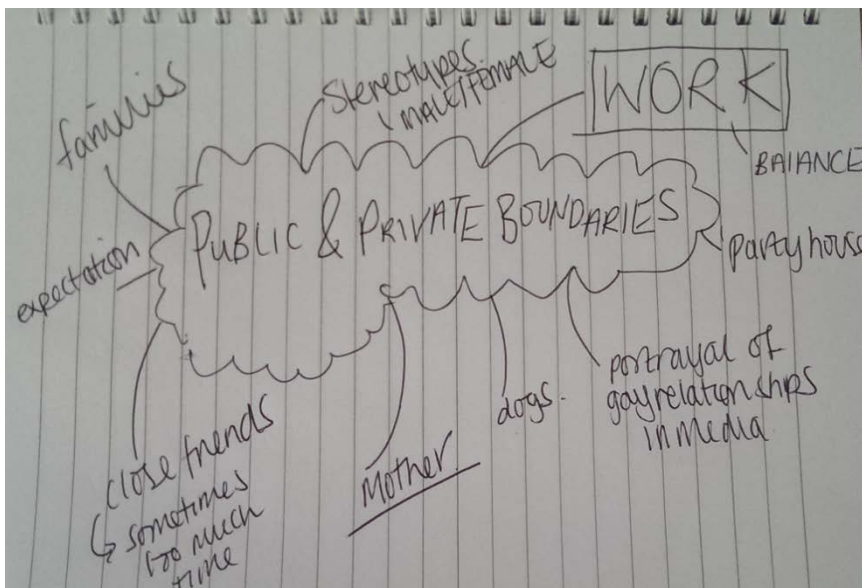
The home, for couples in the TTC study, was a space of multiple meanings and identities (Mallett, 2004; Smart, 2007). It was a physical space for the relationship to grow, where couple identity could be displayed and developed, and it was a space that could be transformed as the individuals and couples changed over time. The home was also an imagined space for the future, carrying the hopes and dreams of the couples. It was regularly shared with others. Participants felt acceptance, belonging, and safety within their homes; they were not only material, but full of emotion, ideals, and meaning. Implicit in the accounts so far is how the home could be a place where the public world intersected with their private lives. Other people and relationships

featured in participants' lives (and homes) in many ways including offering relationship support and causing tension. The next section focuses on these overlapping public/private boundaries of relationships.

6.3 Public/Private Spaces

As already mentioned in this chapter and throughout the thesis, the lives and relationships of participants were embedded in networks of other relationships. Following the pilot interviews, the methodology of the TTC study was altered (see Chapter 3) to explore these relationships in more detail. Thus, participants were asked to produce a photo collage along the theme of public/private boundaries (see Appendix 3). Figure 6.2 displays an example of a collage from Thomas and Greg.

Figure 6.2 Public/Private Boundaries Collage from Thomas and Greg



The collage displays how the boundaries of the couple intersect with socio-cultural notions of sexual identity, gender, and relationships, which is something I discuss regarding relationship rules in Chapter 7. It shows how couples talk of a work-life balance and negotiating the other relationships in their lives (see Chapter 4), as well as showing the relationships beyond the couple,

including families, friends, their mothers, and their dogs. The couple also describe how their home is a hub for their friends, evidenced by the use of '*party house*' in the collage. Thus, the primary relationship intersects with the various other relationships in their lives. Participants frequently, and sometimes simultaneously, conveyed these relationships as sources of support and of difficulty. Other relationships were thus significant in the trials, tribulations, and celebrations of participant relationship experiences. This section explores the complexity of these boundaries between the couple and the outside world by interrogating the spaces which these relationship experiences inhabit. The first section examines positive aspects of relationship support whilst the second section considers the negative instances of discrimination participants experienced.

6.3.1 Relationship Support

Crucial to addressing the third sub-question of the TTC study exploring relationship resources is attending to the support networks of participant relationship experiences. For the majority of couples in the TTC study, family, friends, colleagues, and pets all featured prominently (as displayed in Figure 6.2). These experiences were typically positive and associated with meaningful support, love, and care. Similarly significant others facilitated feelings of intimacy and connectedness. Family and friendships enabled a sense of community and belonging to which participants could turn for support in their relationship and where loved ones could participate in validating the relational present of the younger LGB couples (Heaphy et al., 2013). This could be done in many ways, such as providing emotional support in times of distress, offering financial help with buying houses, spending time and space away from the relationship, and time together as a couple with family and friends, or being involved with marriage or civil partnership ceremonies or other celebrations. The boundaries of the couple move beyond the primary dyad, where other people offer vital support for couples to experience their relationships (Gabb & Fink, 2015). These forms of support were highly cherished by participants.

Carly: *'I don't know, I think, I think my family view it as a very significant relationship. They're always asking when you're coming. And stuff. Like if there's a family meal on or erm, I don't know, I can't even think but say someone's birthday or..., Kat's always invited to whatever we're doing.*

Kat: *Yeah, well when my mum sent an anniversary card I was like this is like the best thing ever. And then her and my dad phoned me and they were like, "Happy anniversary." I was like, they're treating me like an adult (excited) and I thought it was the best thing ever (laughing).'*

[Couple Interview]

Carly and Kat convey their excitement at having their relationship validated by their parents, which occurs through extending the boundaries of their family to include each partner within the other's family. The gestures of support through phone calls and anniversary cards act as a form of affirmation of the relationship which indicates acceptance and belonging, and confirms the status of the couple relationship as adult and serious. The gestures convey a message of support for the couple which enables them to feel happy, secure, and comfortable. The concepts of relationality and embeddedness are important here because the relationship is experienced within a web of other relationships and this works to contextualise the unfolding of everyday life (Smart, 2007). Much like the visit of Bryony's mother highlighting the value of her home environment, the presence of Carly and Kat's parents in their relational space allows them to make sense of their relationship experiences. It reinforces the importance of the socio-cultural context where the majority of participants were not estranged from their families but viewed their family relationships as extremely important (Heaphy et al., 2013). It also supports previous findings indicating the significance of family and friends for validating the couple identity (Kurdek, 2004). Thus, through this support, the couple feel as though their relationship is ordinary and normal, and viewed by others in the same way.

It was common for participants to discuss the importance of family and friends in their lives. Although many participants privileged the couple relationship and asserted it was 'special' (Gabb & Fink, 2015), participants felt it was essential to acknowledge relationships with others in a reciprocal display of love, intimacy, commitment, care, and support (Jamieson, 1998; Weeks et al., 2001). This, in turn, enabled couples to sustain their relationships in many ways, particularly if they were struggling with conflict. Safe spaces for communication away from the couple relationship were created in order to support participants. If this support was not present, couples struggled to support each other through the stresses of their everyday lives, which often negatively affected partner well-being. For example, Remy (who lives abroad with his partner) explained his frustration at feeling isolated living in another country, away from his family and friends, where he relied on his partner for more emotional support than normal. This put a strain on their couple relationship over time where the distance between the couple and their support network impacted negatively on their relationship because the buffers of social support are less available (Cohen & Willis, 1985). Similarly, it displays how mobility might impact on relationship support where there is a lack of social capital and therefore networks for the couple (Henderson et al., 2007). This echoes the importance of maintaining other close relationships for relationship quality, support, and individual well-being (Graham & Barnow, 2013; Heaney & Israel, 2008; Weeks et al., 2001).

On some occasions participants maintained that they would pursue professional relationship support if it was 'needed'. This might have been because couples did not want to talk to friends and family about certain problems, or due to wanting to solve specific issues which may have been viewed as recurring and/or complicated. For example, Anna and Jennie agreed about the potential to seek out family members or friends who might not be objective, whereas a counsellor would be a neutral third party. Frankie and Jules raised specific concerns for which they would attend counselling, such as sexual intimacy practices or challenges with conceiving via IVF. Couple counselling for Remy and Kristoff helped them overcome problems with communication styles

which had led to them questioning their compatibility. There are interesting distinctions between the spaces between couples and how counselling can help bridge couple differences. Anecdotes from counsellor participants, such as Ellen's below, proved insightful in relation to the types of troubles LGB couples come to counselling with.

Ellen: 'Um... they you know they were unusual they were living as a young couple in one of the parental homes and they basically were...you know, I was gonna say really were working on their relationship issues but what I mean is they...because they were secure enough in the way they were living they were able to really work on the relationship issue which was a very one that I experience was a very usual one about it was about one of them not coming forward enough with their emotion-sort of emotional input and the other one feeling like she to make all the running in terms of you know, always like getting blood out of a stone to try and have the other person say anything about their emotions or love or commitment of anything. Um so it was- and they were able to talk about that um to quite a good depth...'

[Focus Group 3]

Ellen discusses a couple she worked with in her clinical practice. Space is important here for a number of reasons. Through counselling the young couple Ellen describes are seeking a safe space in which to reveal their interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict (Freshwater, 2005), aiming to bridge the distance between their relating styles. The public/private boundaries of the individuals come into play when disclosing their inner feelings in the safe space created in the counselling room. The living situation becomes relevant as there may be a power imbalance or feeling of discomfort for the partner who does not live with their parents. There may also be a power imbalance due to the reluctant partner appearing to be less invested in the relationship through a lack of communication about commitment (Peplau et al., 1996). Thus, the counselling room provides a neutral space for the couple to discuss their difficulties in relating, away from the

imposed boundaries which might be in place at home and the power imbalances which may be present. This is especially so in light of how shared space can place constraints on couple navigation in the home (Urry, 2004). Ellen's presence helps the couple to mediate the space to ensure that it remains safe for reciprocal communication, including being able to disclose difficult emotions and hold challenging conversations (Sparks, 2014). This supports counselling research on the importance of creating a safe space for LGB clients (Bradford, 2012; Evans & Barker, 2010). As a consequence, counselling facilitates a deep exploration of the relationship work the couple need to do to sustain their relationship. Ellen also touches on how the concern the couple presented with was a general relationship issue which many couples come to counselling with. Her approach to the session, and potentially Ellen's own LGB identity, means the couple are worked with in a way which does not emphasise their sexual identity (Grove et al., 2013; Milton, 1998), such that the space she creates illuminates the couple's relationship problem in the context of their own relationship experience.

The majority of participants with counselling experience discussed the role of space in a similar way, where the counsellor created a safe space and appropriate boundaries for effective communication of the distances between couples. They were able to feel validated, resolve their differences, or be aware of the work required to close the space between the couple. The stories from participants provide support for the argument that couple counselling can be effective and sustained over time (Relationships Alliance, 2014). However, it should be noted that one participant described a negative experience of counselling where she felt as though the counsellor was overly sympathetic towards her partner, which again emphasises that the counselling needs to be perceived as neutral and safe (Bradford, 2012; Evans & Barker, 2010). Additionally, many relationship counsellors lacked counselling experience with LGB couples, and many LGB participants confirmed they would attend counselling in theory, but did not have direct experience of it.

There were also instances of participants experiencing unsafe spaces in their relationship experiences. This was typically connected to discrimination, prejudice, and marginalisation of their LGB identities and relationships, and is explored in the next section.

6.3.2 Experiences of Discrimination

Chapter 2 outlined research on the marginalisation and discrimination directed at LGB individuals and couples, and how attitudes towards LGB individuals have become more accepting. I have outlined the current zeitgeist of increasing acceptance and the changing socio-cultural contexts of visibility of LGB relationships in the UK. However, painful and negative stories of marginalisation and discrimination still exist as the harmful underbelly of LGB relationship experiences (Heaphy et al., 2013; Thomas, 2014). The majority of participants in the TTC study were acutely aware of and feared such incidents, and some participants had direct experience of some form of homophobia, mostly in public spaces.

Brendan: 'Um, but one time was...err, well, the worst time, the worst language that was used against us, we were called 'gay cunts' by a white van man who drove past us.

Danni: While you were holding hands?

Brendan: Yes. Um....but then, so when we were talking about that afterwards we were saying obviously it's not a nice feeling and, um, it was, we made a point of telling people about it because I don't think a lot of straight people realise that that kind of abuse still happens. Um, so we Tweeted about it and collected the...well, I collected the, um, responses that I got ... so then published that and said, "All of these people have said really nice things about me after I had homophobically motivated attacks, which is lovely." Um, so we're quite conscious of that but we're also quite conscious of the fact that it's not going to stop us holding hands if we want to.'

[Couple Interview]

Brendan's account presents a typical experience of homophobia in a public space for an LGB couple. The incident of homophobic abuse comes after Brendan and his partner Josh are openly displaying their relationship in a public space. The couple engaged in a public display of affection usually reserved for heterosexual couples, thus risking homophobic abuse (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Valentine, 1993). The display violated the social norms of public space, and further exemplifies how intimate practices are embedded in spatial dimensions (Bricknell, 2010; Gabb, 2005b; Gabb & Fink, 2015). This experience of homophobia is one of negative feelings such as isolation, stigmatisation, and lack of belonging, which leads Brendan to search for positive affirmation of his relationship in a space which is more accepting of his identity. Additionally, Brendan and Josh are heavily involved in the LGB community and feel a sense of duty to educate others about their experience. The experience confirms that although there appear to be shifts in attitudes towards LGB couples, homophobia and negative attitudes are more resistant to change than recent socio-legal changes would suggest (Heaphy et al., 2013; Gabb & Fink, 2015). Thus, stories of 'atrocities' are still prevalent among the experiences of LGB individuals and couples (Thomas, 2014).

These types of experience reinforce findings indicating that LGB couples exercise caution in displaying their relationship to others (Gabb & Fink, 2015), where evaluations of 'safe spaces' are made (Clarke et al., 2010). Participants also revealed experiences of discrimination and marginalisation in other spaces where negative experiences did not solely come from strangers. There were several occasions where participants talked about experiences of heteronormativity and homophobia as a result of a lack of understanding from family members. Experiences ranged from couples not being able to display their relationships in certain family settings such as a wedding to extreme negative parental reactions to their coming out. Of the 29 participants, seven alluded to initial negative reactions from parents, although parents had become accepting over time. This supports previous research on parental reactions to coming out (Hancock, 1991). However, one male participant had been disowned by his father and two female participants had

experienced extremely negative reactions from their mothers which had caused substantial distress to their well-being. The most emotional and painful account is from Hilarie.

Hilarie: 'Um...I've had bruises on my arms from my mum...um....but I think that's probably partly because she didn't understand...um, who I, who I was, and I think that was probably partly because she was scared... (sniffs) ...(crying) and some of the things that she said were not very nice...but I, I, I love them because they're my parents but not necessarily agree with them because of their actions. Um... I mean, I had really great friends, ask me now, friends that I've known for years, and they were probably the people that kept me going. Um, they were the ones that made me believe that, you know, that you're not crazy, you're just who you are, um, and in some cases they actually knew me better than I knew myself... Um, and it wasn't until I moved to Southern City that I felt that I could be 100% myself, because they were over a hundred miles away, and when I did come out to them, it was, it was awful. Talking about my parents in this sort of way just takes me back to a really dark place...and...it just sort of, I don't know, it sort of, it, it goes back to that, the way that I felt dead inside for six months...(upset)...Um, it was like at the start of our relationship, that's when it's supposed to be all fun and...good, and you know, you're getting to know somebody, and we couldn't be like that, because of how I was meant to feel about myself, and hate myself....So I just ended up telling her that whatever she did or said wasn't going to change who I was.'

[Individual Interview]

Hilarie's account of her coming out and the acceptance of her identity displays the harrowing reality of some of the experiences of the LGB couples in the TTC study. This experience is bound by space where Hilarie was hiding her lesbian identity in her family home where she felt oppressed (Valentine, 1993; Valentine et al., 2003). It was not until she moved away from her

home that she was able to completely accept herself. The constraints she associated with hiding her identity were no longer in place, giving her the freedom to express and explore her identity. The distance between herself and her parents created a sense of safety, facilitating this identity development and allowing her to feel able to come out and stand up to her parents. The help of her friends was vital in supporting Hilarie with her identity, accepting her, getting through the tough time after coming out, and beginning the relationship with her partner. This reinforces findings on how LGB individuals are more likely to move away from home to find like-minded individuals for support and how location can be important for identity (Henderson et al., 2007). It also shows the significance of friends for social support (Heaphy et al., 2013; Heaney & Israel, 2008; Mattson & Hall, 2011), especially when family estrangement occurs (Weeks et al., 2001).

Despite the support of her friends, the negative parental reaction had an extremely adverse effect on Hilarie's mental health and sense of self. The relational space between herself and her parents becomes one of fear, self-loathing, and emotional and physical hurt shrouded in darkness. It leads Hilarie to become haunted by the negative feelings attached to the relationship with her parents (Gordon, 2011). This further demonstrates how participants can be haunted by memories, emotions, and attachments to particular times, spaces, and/or relationships, such as the physical presence of Jemma's ex-husband in Chapter 4, or the memories attached to Ben's childhood home after his mother died mentioned earlier in this chapter. The experience of these negative feelings leads Hilarie to shut out to the pain she felt. Thus, her talk of feeling dead inside may symbolise a way that she detached herself from the relationship, physically embodying the rejection she received and the disconnection she felt from her parents. It denotes the way in which space can be experienced and imagined in multiple ways including physical, embodied, and relational (Freshwater, 2004; Morrison et al., 2012; Smart, 2007).

This extract illustrates how the research encounter also created a safe space for couples to relive experiences⁸. In this sense, the research encounter also provided a source of relationship support for couples. Most participants found the experience of participating a positive one, explaining that it gave the couple time and space to reflect and take stock of their relationship experiences, where talking and listening was viewed as a beneficial exercise rather than a therapeutic encounter (Gabb & Fink, 2015). The interviews also gave me opportunities for reflection which enhanced and shaped my analysis. I return to this in Chapter 8.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how participants talked about space in relation to the home and to the relational experiences beyond the couple. By exploring ideas of the home, I have conveyed the importance of couple space, which can express couple identity and enable a physical space to anchor and nurture the couple relationship. The home was also a shared space for participants, overlapping with notions of belonging, safety, and community. The shared space was a space of relationality and socialisation, comfort and growth. Throughout, I have argued that space can have different meanings to the individuals that inhabit or imagine it. This becomes particularly salient when illuminating boundaries of space or the ways in which space can be changed or transformed. I have exemplified the ways in which space can extend beyond the couple through appraising the interconnections of relational space with other relationships. Safe and unsafe spaces exist where relationship support and marginalisation characterise relationship experiences outside the primary couple. Here it became necessary to consider the positive and the negative experiences LGB couples face when navigating the wider networks of relationships. These different formulations of space aid couples in experiencing, understanding, and supporting their relationships. Whereas this chapter has mostly been about the home and other networks of

⁸ Whereas in Chapter 5 I talked about my views aligning with participants, here my experiences diverge. The emotional interview with Hilarie evoked a strong reaction from me which undoubtedly affected my need to include her story here, as I want to ensure her voice is heard. The nature of the field notes facilitates important understanding for me to ensure I do not privilege my own experiences and assumptions over those of the participants. Likewise, the disclosure during this experience gave me confidence in my ability as a researcher to create a safe space for couples.

relationships, intimacy has been prevalent throughout. Intimacy represented a crucial resource for the relationship experiences of the younger LGB couples, and this is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 7 : Intimacy

7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the intimate worlds of LGB couples and how they are able to draw on each other as a resource for their relationship. My attention is focused here upon how couples experienced and maintained a sense of connectedness through intimacy and intimate practices, and the sources of difficulty which had the potential for feelings of disconnection. The chapter begins by examining how participants attached meaning to intimacy within their relationships, and draws on conceptualisations of intimacy introduced in Chapter 2. This is extended by focusing on three different forms of intimacy – emotional intimacy, physical affection, and sexual intimacy. In the emotional intimacy section, participant understandings of their couple dynamics, intimate closeness, and partner support are discussed. The role of physical affection is also interrogated. This section includes exploring how physical affection overlaps and unites the sexual and emotional dimensions of intimacy. The sexual intimacy section appraises the differing participant understandings, meanings and definitions of sex, and considers how talk of sex in the interviews opened up discussion around relationship rules.

Throughout this analysis it is my intent to unpick the differing ways in which these forms of intimacy are constructed and understood. I investigate the intersections of expressing emotions, love, care, and support whilst locating them within the participants' contextual experiences, as well as exploring potential gender differences among couples. In the final section, the 'intimate practices' of couples are explored. Food and laughter are given as further examples of intimate practice which can facilitate couple intimacy and serve as relationship connectors for couples.

7.2 Conceptualisations of Intimacy

As discussed in Chapter 2, conceptualisations of intimacy have been re-evaluated in recent decades (Giddens, 1992; Jamieson, 1998) and this transformation has seen a shift in

understandings of intimacy from (hetero) sexuality to a broader view of intimacy including mutual disclosure of feelings, respect, and emotional closeness (Gabb, 2010a). Intimacy can come in many forms and this was recognised by all participants. As Kristoff says, *'there are different kinds'*. Intimacy was referred to as *'closeness'* (Carl), *'anything between a cuddle to sex'* (Harry), *'eating together'* (Jules), *'physical intimacy'* (Maddie), and *'emotional intimacy'* (Sasha). There were differing values placed upon the different forms of intimacy, with the meanings appearing to be fluid, dependent on the situation or the relationship dynamic of the couple. In this sense, intimacy was seen as something that was hard to define.

Josh: *'You can't really say things which are intimate and things which aren't, I don't think, there's no black line dividing them is there? Um, and equally there are things that can mean intimacy and then the same thing could also not mean intimacy. Um, it depends on the situation and what we think about it...'*

[Couple Interview]

Josh refers to how intimate acts and non-intimate acts are difficult to distinguish because understandings of intimacy are contextually bound and individually meaningful. Intimacy, therefore, is something which is 'done'. It is *experienced* and *practiced* within relationships through emotional and physical expressions and, as a result, Josh finds intimacy difficult to put into words. The ways Josh and his partner 'do' intimacy are meaningful to them and their relationship within these changing circumstances. The intimate acts comprise emotional, physical, and sexual dimensions which are woven together within their relationship experience to inform their understandings of intimacy. 'Practices of intimacy', then, create multiple modes of meaning and ways of relating to one another, allowing intimate practices to convey different meanings at different times. One intimate act could communicate numerous things simultaneously or have shifting significance for partners. These changing circumstances enable intimate practices to become a vehicle to convey feelings and emotions, to communicate love, and to reiterate partner

care, support, and 'presence' within the relationship. This 'presence' was discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to time and routine. Thus, intimacy is not just spoken, but felt, seen, and sensed. Acts such as sex, talking, eating together, and cuddles combine and develop over time to inform couple scripts of relating (Heaphy & Einarsdottir, 2012). The non-intimate and intimate intersect through practices of intimacy which create connectedness between couples.

Understanding definitions and experiences of intimacy as individually meaningful and simultaneously differentiated (emotional, sexual and physical) enables a complex and multi-faceted conception of intimacy to emerge.

7.3 Emotional Intimacy

Throughout the data the emotional dimensions of couple connectedness emerged as paramount to intimate experience and relationship maintenance. The emotional closeness of this form of intimacy served to create a foundation for participant relationships and ensured individuals felt safe and secure. This section explores three aspects of emotional intimacy as articulated by participants in the TTC study – the couple dynamic, intimate closeness, and the 'couple team'. Throughout, intersections of communication, conflict, love, and trust are acknowledged which serve as (dis)connectors for emotional intimacy.

7.3.1 The Couple Dynamic

Many couples in the TTC study voiced a sense of compatibility, where they felt they were completely comfortable with their partner, and their similarities and differences complemented each other. These descriptions were often entwined with negotiating individual identity, couple identity, and the associated tensions between areas of similarity and difference. The result of these negotiations of identity, similarity, and difference is termed the 'couple dynamic'. The couple dynamic refers to how the couple interact in their ways of relating and making their relationship work. This fostered an emotional closeness not present in other relationships (for

example, friendships) and was viewed as an active and ongoing negotiation of their identities. Two concepts become important – ‘cognitive interdependence’ and ‘separate togetherness’.

Some couples talked about being extremely close to their partner, and largely developing a sense of their own identity through their couple identity. As such they may have been displaying a sense of fusion in their relationships (Cohen & Savin-Williams, 1996; Weinstock, 2004). For example, Elena explicitly talked of how she felt that through her relationship with her partner she was able to hold an identity of ‘we’ where *‘two people is who I am now rather than me on my own’*. She talked about always wanting to spend time with and share her life completely with her partner. It appears as though Elena is not having time out or away from the relationship and, therefore, is not using time as a resource for personal autonomy (see Chapter 4), which would suggest fusion within the couple dynamic is likely. However, analysing this as a fusion of identities oversimplifies the situation as it ignores the influential contextual factors that may be at work and the interplay of their couple identity with Elena’s individual identity (Kitzinger & Coyle, 1995).

Elena is 21 years old; she spoke of not being entirely comfortable with her sexuality and lives apart from her partner, she has been in the relationship for a year, and it is her first serious one. Elena is still unsure of her own individual identity, where her age, sexual orientation, relationship experience, and relationship duration intertwine to create a desire to spend as much time with her partner as possible because she is exploring her own identity, sexual orientation, and preferred ways of relating. She is experiencing the excitement of being in a relationship. Therefore, a reading of fusion becomes more complicated. Adopting a ‘we’ identity is displaying ‘cognitive interdependence’, meaning there is a purposeful overlap in identities (Agnew Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998), signifying commitment to the couple relationship (Miller, 2012). Elena has this mirrored back by her partner creating a couple dynamic which fosters emotional closeness through this mutuality.

All couples spoke about themselves as a 'we', but several participants simultaneously acknowledged themselves and their partners as individuals. Elena says her partner is '*not an extension of me*'. She talked of spending time alone with her friends and not '*being coupley*' in large groups, particularly in public spaces. She uses time as resource for personal autonomy as mentioned in Chapter 4, and demonstrates how participants' choices to display their relationships are bound by experiences of space, where she resists the couple identity in certain situations. She thus acknowledges her individuality and the changing contexts of her life and further distances herself from a fusion of identities (Peplau et al., 1996).

A pattern present among several couples was how their couple dynamics enabled emotional intimacy where they developed a 'we' identity but did not lose their own individuality. I refer to this as 'separate togetherness', which I discussed in Chapter 4 when talking about personal autonomy. It was a common theme among participants, where they described themselves as being '*two peas in the same pod*' (Maddie), and '*two different peas but cocooned in the same pod*' (Veronica). This was often explained as finding a balance of being *individuals* who are in a relationship, and frequently bound to socio-cultural scripts of relationship ideals around love.

Remy: *'So I think, I think there's, we are very much opposed to this idea that we're two halves to complete a whole. Like I'm not an incomplete person, he's not an incomplete person, we're whole people who are choosing to bind our lives together. So it's like this, I don't know if you can see it but this is the image... (Holds up image) is that visible?*

Danni: *Yea, is that a tree?*

Remy: *It's two trees*

Danni: *Two trees*

Remy: *Intertwined*

Danni: *Okay, yep, I like that.*

Remy: *And, that's our religious marriage contract, you can't see the writing cos it's so tiny but um...but you know, it's two trees intertwined and one's in twilight and one's in sunrise and it's sort of like, we are those two trees, you know, that image really fits us, it's like we're two separate trees but our roots have grown together and so...we're two whole beings who've come together and formed, you know, two beings that are intertwined basically.'* **[Couple Interview]**

Remy talks of his need to feel like a separate individual who is sharing his life with his husband Kristoff. He is challenging typical socio-cultural scripts around notions of love and relationships meaning finding a partner who will complete you (Barker, 2013). He maintains that intimacy can be facilitated by having the right balance between personal autonomy and the couple dynamic. In this sense, the couple dynamic is one where they *choose* to connect and spend their lives together, growing and developing, but in a way which is healthy for them as individuals. The level of dependence on each other creates a couple dynamic of autonomous individuals pursuing individual interests, who are simultaneously sharing their lives together with respect to time and experiences (Muzzetto, 2006). Thus they are achieving separate togetherness. Attending to the multiple conceptions of love within relationships becomes crucial here. In Chapter 4, I demonstrated how shared time and presence within the relationship communicated and expressed love in various ways. Remy and Kristoff's choice to connect is implicitly based on their love for each other and their commitment to their relationship. Love becomes a relational process which one 'does' and 'feels' (Smart, 2007; p. 59) and it is an ideological requirement for commitment (Heaphy et al., 2013). The areas of light and dark which characterise the trees in Remy and Kristoff's marriage contract signify their autonomy and individuality, and the recognition of differences between the two men. Love becomes a practice of intimacy, where the acceptance of difference fosters emotional closeness because the partners feel as though they can be themselves. This was seen in other participant accounts, where for instance Hayley describes identity differences as *'about seeing an imperfect person perfectly'*. This enables

couples to feel as though their areas of dissimilarity complement each other, emphasising compatibility in the couple dynamic.

Couples also appeared to place a greater emphasis on ensuring they achieved symmetry on the 'meaningful and important' aspects of their identities i.e. relational values such as trust, and sharing similar desires for the future and ways of living. This symmetry of relational values was the 'glue that held couples together' (Mackey et al., 1997, p. 167). The values varied for each couple but seemed to work for them, where couples achieved a relational fit between their individual and couple identities. For instance, Kim and Emma talk of the significance of both women being lesbians, vegetarians, conservationists, and feminists, and Lindsey and Dana each have their own career aspirations and want a family in the future. This compatibility achieves a basis for authentic relationships (Valentine & Hughes, 2012). The process of accepting and embracing areas of similarity and difference with respect to identities within the couple dynamic is vital for maintaining the relationship. It represents how love can convey acceptance, which can be viewed as critical relationship work (Gabb & Fink, 2015). The affirmation creates a culture of love and happiness which allows partners to reject the pressure that can be associated with following socio-cultural and temporal scripts of finding the perfect partner or Mr/Ms Right who fits all relationship ideals (Barker, 2013)⁹.

The younger LGB couples in the TTC study then, appear to be presenting an optimistic view of overcoming and accepting difference within their couple dynamic. They may be demonstrating the cognitive maintenance mechanism of 'positive illusions' which leads partners to downplay

⁹ The notion of separate togetherness and rejecting socio-cultural scripts around love is something I feel quite passionate about for my own relationships. Here, then, I align with participants like Remy where I value my independence and autonomy. The fieldwork, analysis, and writing up this chapter helped me to process my feelings about what I want from a relationship. This is something I noted in a reflective diary entry during fieldwork where I say '*I don't want to find myself in a relationship where my happiness is contingent on them and their happiness is contingent on me. I think that is unhealthy and too much pressure* (2nd June 2014). For me, placing such pressure on another person to keep me happy in a relationship makes me feel less autonomous. Thus, it is a balance I place importance on in my current relationship. In this sense, like my participants, I am drawing from my past relationships and experiences to inform my current scripts for relating. Feeling unhappy in my previous relationship also illuminated our differences and made me realise that the dynamic was one which I did not desire and felt unable to change.

flaws and differences as trivial in order to accommodate negative traits or behaviour and thus continue the relationship (Miller, 2012). This represents another way couples can view their relationships as long-term, as examined in Chapter 5. The landscape, however, is in reality considerably more complex. For example, some couples adopted socio-cultural scripts around love and relationships, with some participants describing their partners as their 'soulmate' or implicitly suggesting their partner was 'the one'. Even those participants such as Hayley (above) who recognised that no one person could be perfect, spoke of how previous partners were not right in some way and her current partner represented a better fit (Barker, 2013).

Some couples also viewed their dynamic more favourably when compared to other couples they knew, recognising tension in the differences of others. This may further represent a cognitive maintenance mechanism to sustain their personal couple relationship, through the *display* of complementarity in their couple dynamic. It is important to note that such positive assertions and 'couple narratives' were mostly articulated in the couple interviews, with both partners present. In the individual interviews other factors came to the fore - with areas of tension surrounding differences becoming more noticeable. This was particularly evident in the different ways of relating that were contextually-bound to individual biographies. On these occasions, partners engaged in vital emotion work to overcome their differences.

Lara: 'Um.... the main thing is moodiness. And I think I wind her up as well because I'm particularly rational about things and I go, okay, this has happened, then, okay, now we have to do this, this and this, and now it's over, let's move on. Come on, let's do something else, whereas she gets upset about things and... she's like, no I can't do this, I'm upset now. And I get frustrated, I think, ooh, if you do this you might not be upset, it might get you out of your mood, and she thinks... I think I move on from things quicker than she does, and I think that stresses her out because... I don't know, she once said to me, um, "Just because I've got emotions"

(laughing). I do have emotions but I think they just run at different times. Um... I know, so that is one issue that we, it is quite a, not a recurring issue but whenever we have an argument or...a nigggle... that's the only issue we've had that's ever been repeated... I think just we are different, you know, you can't have two people that are exactly the same... Apart from that I think there's not any issues. Well I hope not. You might know different because you had an interview with her last week (laughing).'

[Individual Interview]

Lara exemplifies how areas of difference within the couple dynamic can cause tensions between the couple. For Lara and her partner the tension concerns specific aspects of their individual identities and ways of relating. At the times when niggles occur, or reoccur, the couple engage in emotion work to overcome their differences and manage their feelings to reach a resolution in the conflict. This becomes necessary due to the different expectations of the emotions in the situation creating a 'pinch' or discrepancy in what they think the other *should* be feeling (Hochschild, 1979). These expectations are embedded in their biographies and the interplay of socio-cultural contexts. Lara sees her partner's behaviour and emotions as moodiness whereas her partner views it as being upset. From Lara's partner's point of view Lara's reaction is unemotional and doesn't fit with the appropriate 'feeling rules' of the situation. Both partners attempt to manage the other's emotions to eliminate the discrepancy and increase understanding of altered ways of experiencing the situation. This in turn aims to promote the emotional well-being of the partners (Holm et al., 2001). Lara's account conveys her frustration at the reoccurrences where often, although the emotion work is being done, it is not successful. It is an ongoing negotiation of the differing ways each partner experiences conflict and the associated emotions each individual feels. The individual interview allows Lara to communicate this frustration, whereas the women's exchanges in their couple interview about these individual differences were downplayed and masked by humour and 'couple banter' (Gabb & Fink, 2015). This demonstrates how individuals may also be engaging in their own emotion work through

working on the emotions they feel about the differences in the couple dynamic. Voicing discontent in the individual interview allowed the partners to rationalise areas of tension without causing conflict within the couple dynamic.

This type of rationalisation of differences and the subsequent emotion work was a common feature during individual interviews. For example, Adele, who comes from Mainland Europe, spoke of the differences (cultural and emotional) between herself and her British partner, where she feels comfortable with conflict but she often had to tone down her passionate nature to appease her sensitive, conflict-avoidant partner. Appraising this difference aided Adele in working on her emotions to bridge the tension within their couple dynamic. This was not devoid of frustration in having to actively monitor such behaviour. Their emotion work characterises an intimate practice which allows partners to maintain emotional connection rather than highlighting areas of difference which could increase conflict and feelings of disconnection. Attending to these disparities, though, facilitates insight into the complexities of the couple dynamic and the associated emotion work necessary for couples in the TTC study to maintain emotional closeness.

The couple dynamic provides insight into individual and couple identity management. Recognising the nuances of the research methods enables exploration of contrasts in individual and couple accounts concerning the tensions that differences in the couple dynamic can produce, and the emotion work partners engage in. This methodologically attuned analysis helps to advance understanding of intimate practices working to facilitate a sense of closeness, which I will now explore.

7.3.2 Intimate Closeness

Research has emphasised the importance of intimate closeness in sustaining personal relationships through talking and listening, sharing, knowing, and understanding (Jamieson, 1998). These factors are critical factors in how participants practiced intimacy. Accounts of the

couple dynamic and identity in participant data were often embedded in stories of how they got to know one another on a profoundly intimate level. Participants understood their own identities, couple identities, and the couple dynamic, through 'deep knowing' and understanding (Gabb, 2010a; Jamieson, 1998). Deep knowing fosters intimate knowledge between couples because they access privileged information about each other. This enables increased understanding of cognitive and emotional aspects of individual behaviour and facilitates intimate closeness. These qualities were perceived as essential for relationship maintenance, and something that was built up over time.

Ben: 'I think ultimately it boils down to knowing each other and knowing um...what makes us tick and being able to read the subtle signs of how somebody's feeling, or how [Partner] is feeling, he can do the same for me. And that's how it works and why we've been together for so long. Um, we just...know each other, so well and know exactly what the other person's thinking.' **[Individual Interview]**

Ben attributes the success of his 11 year relationship to knowing and understanding, thus going beyond *disclosing* intimacy and suggesting that the emotional closeness of intimacy is a non-verbal understanding. Both members of the couple can read each other's body language and subtle unspoken gestures and behaviour to reveal and reflect their feelings. The implications of not communicating are interesting for the two men. It suggests that deep knowing may lead to less communication over time within relationships, findings that are reinforced by other large-scale research (Gabb & Fink, 2015) and research stipulating the importance of non-verbal communication (Miller, 2012). It may also reflect gender differences in communication where female couples have a higher affinity for communication than male couples (Mackey et al., 1997; Weeks et al., 2001). However, these gender differences should not assume male non-disclosure (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993); more complex interpretations of emotional intimacy need to be considered. The communication in this relationship may be symbolic of the couple dynamic,

where Ben and his partner have found a method of communicating which works for them as a couple. In their accounts of communication the couple discuss the dynamics of their relationship where Ben is very upfront and honest about his feelings but his partner is less forthcoming, and is playfully described by both partners as an *'emotional robot'*. Ben conveys frustration with his partner's tendency to communicate in this manner (much like the examples of Lara and Adele above) but he views it as part of the couple dynamic which has built up positively over time – part of getting to know one another. They suggest that their respective ways of communicating can be traced back to childhood, where Ben was brought up in an environment where his family shared feelings and aired conflict, whereas his partner's upbringing was riven with hidden feelings and unspoken tension. The deep knowing within their relationship, including being aware of how their individual differences in biographies inform their communication styles, promotes empathy within the couple. Both partners are able to read the other's emotions and thereby to develop an understanding of each other's feelings and behaviours. Deep knowing becomes a crucial component of emotional intimacy for this couple; a way of practising intimacy within their relationship that works with respect to their individual ways of being.

Not all couples placed as much importance on deep knowing, and for many couples, both male and female, a deeper connection was facilitated through deep knowing *and* communication. Communication was seen as vital to understanding and knowing one's partner and was imperative to maintaining intimate closeness within relationships. In these cases emotional intimacy was often connected to and explicitly different from sexual intimacy and physical affection.

Remy: *'Um...but I think, to me, intimacy is allowing someone a glimpse into your mind, you know, so it's not just like, oh we have sex or oh we're naked together but...you know, it's allowing someone that glimpse into your mind and what you're really thinking about something.'*

[Couple Interview]

For Remy, the emotional aspect of intimacy is imperative within his relationship. To contextualise, he uses sex and physical closeness to define intimacy but extends its importance to include his experience of vulnerability with his partner Kristoff. The intimate closeness fosters a nakedness of his soul where giving his partner a '*glimpse into his mind*' allows both men to believe they completely know and understand one another. It offers an opportunity to appreciate each other in recognition that there is something special about sharing their innermost thoughts. This form of intimate practice allows a deeper understanding of each other and inspires intimate closeness. This serves to connect Remy and Kristoff; to create a space for exploration and expression of emotions, feelings, and thoughts. It provides the partners with a safe space for revealing their innermost selves, where they can be vulnerable through affording intimate privileged knowledge to each other (Jamieson, 1998).

This was a common theme among participants who talked about a deep level of openness within their couple relationships. Remy's partner Kristoff talked about there being no '*barriers*' in communication. Polly liked being able to share her '*weird thoughts*' with her partner. Sasha and Maddie stated that it was nice to '*share your intimate secrets or intimate kind of fantasies*' in '*intimate weirdness*.' These data indicate that openness and vulnerability allows couples to become deeply intimate and 'know' one another, and that this can facilitate trust which reinforces the couple relationship. This mutual trust, communication, and shared understanding can create a foundation for a couple to continue their relationship, to communicate openly, and to support each other. This notion of couple support is interrogated in the final section on emotional intimacy.

7.3.3 The Couple Team

I have discussed thus far how the couple dynamic facilitated emotional intimacy through the meanings of love and acceptance attached to participant accounts. It was shown that intimate

closeness fostered trust, developed understanding, and affected communication. Support is a mainstay within these couple narratives, with the mutuality and reflections of intimate practices which facilitate emotional intimacy and closeness creating an environment where partners feel supported, which in turn enhances emotional security within the relationship.

Figure 7.1 Kim and Emma Photo Collage Image



Emma: 'Oliver and Company!

Kim: Being on the same team!

Emma: Aww, yea...

Kim: ...Being on the same team...and that feels very intimate, that no matter how else...no matter who else interacts with you and no matter how differently they think from you, you've got someone who is on the same team and that feels...very special.'

[Couple Interview]

Kim and Emma included a scene from the Disney film *Oliver & Company* in their intimacy collage (see Figure 7.1). The film is about an orphaned kitten that is taken in and accepted by a misfit family of dogs and their owner. In their interview they elaborated upon why they included the image, its meaning for them. A central feature of intimacy for the two women was feeling that you have the support of your partner as well as the feelings of mutual belonging and acceptance. The image therefore stands as a metaphor for the couple who feel as though their identities can be a source of tension and isolation from their families, particularly for Emma. The storyline thus symbolises their sense of themselves - the couple dynamic and intimate closeness within their

relationship. Both women feel an unconditional level of support from each other where any stress or adversity thrown their way can be faced together. The emotional intimacy communicates solidarity and acceptance. It provides a foundation for the couple to grow and builds the relationship ready for future imaginings where anything is possible, as long as they have each other. Partner support, then, facilitates feelings of satisfaction, enabling the relationship to be maintained over time (Graham & Barnow, 2013; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998).

This idea of couple and partner support was prevalent among all participants and was an important part of couple intimacy. Participants often spoke of knowing they would get through any troubles and stresses because they could rely on each other. For example, Cameron said *'I know we've got each other, I don't worry about making it through the rest of the things cos I know somehow we'll figure it out'*. The implications of care here are crucial. Care can be construed as a mental disposition of concern or refer to actual practices (Tronto, 1998). The importance then stems from the ways in which couples demonstrate concern for the well-being of both partners, and are able to acknowledge and meet their needs. This nurtures feelings of security and trust, which reinforces the support within the relationship (Reis, 2014). The feelings of partner support and solidarity combine with those associated with the couple dynamic and intimate knowing, to allow couples to use emotional intimacy as a connector to maintain their relationships. Emotional intimacy was, however, only one dimension of the intimate practices for couples in the TTC study. Emotional closeness was also often fostered through physical affection.

7.4 Physical Affection

For couples in the TTC study physical affection was described as an integral part of intimacy, reinforcing previous research findings on LGB couples (Mackey et al., 1997). Physical affection included physical presence, a touch, a cuddle, or a kiss. Although these acts of affection were present in talk around sex and intimacy, physical affection was attributed a different meaning based on the context of the act and the couple and/or individuals involved. This distinction is

important as the intimate practices associated with physical affection differed when compared to those associated with sexual intimacy. Relationship experiences were affected differently, particularly as practices changed and developed over time and in different spatial contexts. Whereas sexual intimacy was discussed through ideas of peaks and troughs, physical affection was a more continuous experience. These everyday practices of intimacy facilitated closeness, carried emotions, and provided affirmation for couples.

Justine: 'There's virtually no instance where we are together where there is no form of physical contact, no matter how fleeting. There would not be enough space on the floor plan if we put a sticker for every touch. So the stickers represent any physical contact that lasts more than 20 seconds. We constantly touch when we pass each other in the house, a kiss when coming in to the house or in the same room.'

[Emotion Map Notes]

Justine and her partner of two years currently live together after moving from a small one bedroom flat into a much bigger house. The couple talk positively of the move in relation to having more personal and couple space to experience their relationship. Justine describes how physical affection transcends time and this bigger space of the new house. It is ubiquitous in her relationship and, accordingly, is difficult to measure through the visual and verbal means available in the research. It just 'naturally' occurs when Justine and her partner are in close proximity. It is as though physical affection is an unstoppable force where the couple are physically drawn to each other. It also represents the spatial intersection of intimate practices, especially in the context of how the couple navigate the space of their home. Physical affection, be it a touch or a kiss, allows the partners to feel connection and is an embodied expression of their love and co-presence. It provides affirmation and reassurance on an emotional and physical level which, in turn, provides both members of the couple with emotional security and a sense of mutuality and reciprocity.

This was a prominent pattern among couples where physical affection provided unspoken emotional reassurance, most clearly illustrated when participants discussed the meanings of any absence or lack of physical affection, which could signify a problem within their relationship. Veronica exemplifies this by saying: *'if I started to shy away from the person I was with, there's something fundamentally wrong'*. Such sentiments were often associated with previous partnerships, much like the conflict management and resolution strategies discussed in Chapter 4. Past relationships thus served as 'biographical anchors' or 'scripts' informing present ways of relating behaviour (Heaphy et al., 2013; Heaphy & Einarsdottir, 2012) where participants learned the importance of physical intimacy in remaining close to a partner. In such instances, participants recalled undesirable behaviour, and spoke positively of the intimate practices within their current relationship.

Liam: 'One of the things that I really like about [Partner] is that um he's not afraid to be affectionate or tactile, you know [Ex-Partner] absolutely hated physical affection and [Ex-Husband] was only happy with affection when it was sex, you know he wasn't really, he didn't really care much one way or another about any other types. Um so yea I feel like affection and intimacy and cuddles are non-stop with me and [Partner] we are attached at the hip pretty much in that regard.'

[Individual Interview]

Liam discusses the role of physical intimacy with reference to past frames of relating. The conflict surrounding physical affection in his previous relationships enables him to contextualise his current relationship experiences positively. The '*non-stop*' affection and cuddles from his partner provide him with the emotional safety and reassurance that were absent from his previous partnerships. Maintaining the level of intimacy he seeks in a relationship allows him to view the relationship as working successfully. Giddens' (1992) idea of the 'pure relationship' is evidenced

here. The mutuality and equality of the physical affection, and Liam's associated positive feelings of security and attachment, suggest the relationship is working and Liam's individual needs are being met. Liam's suggestion that physical affection was feared by his previous partners points to the potential negative impacts of norms and stereotypes around masculinity and emotions. Male sex drive discourses suggest that men value sex above other types of intimacy whilst showing emotions signifies weakness and vulnerability (Holm et al., 2001). Such norms were not, however, evident among male participants within the TTC study. Most male participants, like Liam, recognised the importance of physical affection and non-verbal communication within their relationships outside of the context of sexual intimacy. This displays how the findings of the TTC complicate previous research on gender, and this is discussed further in Chapter 8.

An underlying theme is how emotions can be attached and conveyed through physical affection. As well as providing participants and couples with affirmations of love and security, physical affection was a method of showing emotional support. This was a treasured and integral part of intimacy and meant couples did not always need to communicate verbally. Partners could offer each other emotional support through physical affection, and this was particularly the case when open communication may not have been possible, as demonstrated in Chloe and Leanne's account when talking about a family bereavement.

Leanne: 'I suppose, er, like, cuddling and touch and that went up, didn't it, really?'

Chloe: Yeah, because I was difficult, you know, some things can be quite painful to talk about, and you actually can't physically talk about them. So that, sort of, affection and support is, like, a physical support, because, you know, that's the only support that you can give, or, you know, that actually helps. So yeah, that did shoot up quite a bit, didn't it?

Leanne: Mm.

Chloe: *Um, yeah, so you just, sort of, er, it's all done, you know, unconsciously, because we know each other so well. And it was a new situation for both of us, you know, my mum, you know, and Leanne was really great, and you just help how you can, sort of, you know, do your best, don't you?* **[Couple Interview]**

For these women, physical affection is about co-presence, such as when Chloe's inability to talk about the painful situation of her mother's illness and subsequent death leads to a greater emphasis on physical affection. The increase of these acts enabled the couple to remain close and for Leanne to support Chloe without the need for communication. Physical affection did emotion work for them and reinforced their mutual 'deep knowing'. Intimacy is communicated by couples not exclusively through language or the verbal but through touch, feelings, thoughts, and shared knowledge and understanding, again reaffirming the significance of non-verbal communication (Miller, 2012). Additionally, Chloe talks of how much she appreciated the practical support that Leanne offered for her and her mum. Later in the interview she describes how Leanne took time off work to drive to and attend hospital appointments with Chloe and her mother. This thoughtful, kind act provided practical care and support, affirming love and commitment to the partnership and a concern for the well-being of both Chloe and her mother (Reis, 2014; Tronto, 1998). It reinforces the presence and importance of Leanne in Chloe's life and evidences her commitment to their relationship.

Many couples in this research extended physical intimacy to emotional support. For example, Jules and Frankie said that they *'do a lot of touching in response to how we perceive the other's emotional state'* (Frankie); *'emotional soothing is physical soothing, other than talking'* (Jules). Similarly, Daniel and his partner communicate with *'smiles, winks, sticking our tongue out at each other'*. Such physical affection not only enriched the moment but enabled couples to remain intimately connected over the long-term.

Polly: *'I think it is easy to, to fall out of the habit of just being affectionate to each other and just showing affection and it's a nice kind of, base level of just you know, I love you, all the time, all day long, I love you.. I think...it keeps it healthy, it keeps you reminded that...you are in a relationship with this person...do you know Dan Savage?... one of the things he said (laughs) is that ah, when he's arguing with his husband... he said there's a little voice in the back of his brain when he gets really angry with his husband going 'don't kill him, you have to have sex with him, later' and ah (laughs) I think that kind of, it's that oxytocin thing isn't it? You know the more physical contact you have, the easier it is, the easier it is to be in love and to keep...feeling that tenderness that stops you from being mean when you are annoyed with them, getting personal or getting, taking things badly you know...it adds a layer of sweetness to everything because you just are tender with each other and you, it keeps you in the habit of just feeling like looking after each other and being nice, you know.'*

[Individual Interview]

Polly alludes to how physical affection operates in the space between sex and emotions, enabling couples to stay both emotionally and physically close. She invokes biological and neurological discourses of physical affection and love as a way to validate the role of continued physical affection within her relationship. It is claimed that oxytocin, known as the 'cuddle chemical' or 'hormone', increases desire for physical affection, improves pleasure during sex, and can contribute to feelings of closeness (Ackerman, 1994; Chapman, 2011; Yong, 2012). As a result, the acts of affection within her relationship become a method of enhancing intimacy and the connectedness of the couple. For Polly, if the physical intimacy were to stop, it might lead to dampening of the feelings of love and attraction between the couple and would likely mean increased conflict and distance. Polly's use of 'agony aunt' Dan Savage further illustrates how some of the couples in the TTC study engage with socio-cultural resources by using LGB role models as resources to understand their long-term relationships (see Chapter 5). It demonstrates

how participants are engaging with many different discourses to construct and make sense of their relationship experiences.

Physical affection can thus be understood as an intimate practice of love and kindness, and its role in bridging sexual and emotional intimacy demonstrates its significance within younger LGB couples relationships. Forms of emotional, physical and sexual intimacy combine in different ways for each couple. The meanings placed upon and conveyed through physical acts help couples to feel, sense, and connect with each other at different levels, in different situations, and for different purposes. Physical affection can signify love, commitment, communication and emotional connection. For many, sexual intimacy indicated deeper desire and attraction.

7.5 Sexual Intimacy

As highlighted in Chapter 2, there is a plethora of literature on sex and sexual intimacy (Gabb & Fink, 2015) including how sex can change over time (Heaphy et al., 2013; Mackey et al., 1997) and how contexts need to be considered when appraising LGB sexual activity (Frye, 1990; Kitzinger & Coyle, 1995). This work shows the ways in which sex acts remain highly gendered (Clarke et al., 2010; Peel, 2005; Weeks et al., 2001), as illustrated by notions of 'lesbian bed death' and the hyper-masculinity of gay men (Weeks et al., 2001). This section focuses on how participants describe the meanings of sexual intimacy within their relationships, before discussing how sexual intimacy opens up discourses of relationship rules, monogamy and fidelity. Throughout, I comment on the impact of gender and sexuality on love, sex, and emotions.

7.5.1 Meanings of Sex

Sexual intimacy among couples in the TTC study was often described in complex ways. Participants spoke of definitions and meanings of sex, and the role of sex within their relationships, alongside the associated emotions and feelings of pleasure, love, anxiety, and difficulty. Some participants, particularly females, described how their sexual practices were often

questioned by others because of socio-cultural norms which privilege heterosexual penetrative intercourse. In these instances, accounts were filled with frustration at the lack of understanding and validation of their intimate practices. Likewise, talking about the meaning of sex sometimes led to discomfort and anxiety.

Rose: *'It doesn't necessarily mean achieving orgasm but the intention to at least get close to orgasm, would make it sex, and the intention maybe to dedicate time to it. Um, it's not just something, it's not just a snack between meals, it is a meal, a sit down meal. That it's, like you've said that's what we're doing, even if it's spontaneous, nothing else is gonna happen at this point, the TV isn't on, the, we're not waiting for Neighbours or anything, I don't know why I said the word Neighbours (laughs)... another thing that [Partner] and I have discussed quite a bit, cos obviously, being gay and particularly, in [Northern European Country], the question we get asked a lot is 'How do lesbians have sex?' (funny voice). And then when you explain, nine times out of ten they'll be like, well that's not really sex, you're like, yes it is (animated) yes it is... But then with most straight couples it is penetration, it is, that's, that's the line, and I've had penetrative interactions with men that I would not consider sex because...sort of, one thrust, or like whatever, that is not sex, no that's just messing around (laughs)'* **[Individual Interview]**

Rose demonstrates that the meanings and definitions of sex can differ depending on factors such as identity, biography, location, and socio-cultural norms. Her own experiences of sex within her relationship are vital in contextualising her definition. Rose is bisexual, and in her diary she talked of how sex with her partner could sometimes be difficult. This sometimes led to feelings of failure if she could not make her partner orgasm and made her miss the *'ever-ready nature of sex with men'*. The anxiety in her definition is highly likely to be bound up with these feelings around sexual intimacy. Sex is not defined by the act itself but by *what the act means* to her and her

partner. The meaning ascribed to sex is dependent on commitment and attention rather than the outcome. She suggests there is something fundamentally different between having 'sex' and 'playing'. Sex signifies intimate closeness whilst 'messaging around' is associated with casual sex or sexual acts where emotions are not conveyed. Her use of metaphor to explain the intention of sex is also telling. She suggests sex can be part of a ritual or routine which is just as important as eating. It is an activity that should be given her whole attention; it nourishes and is an essential part of life. Defining sex in this way allows Rose to validate her own experiences by reaffirming the importance of intimacy and commitment, and downplaying 'messaging around'. Thus, her definition appears to take away the pressure she feels around her perceived failings in sexual performance whilst simultaneously ensuring her own needs for closeness are met through physical connection and shared time together.

Most participants did not go into this level of detail about sex, perhaps because of the feelings of embarrassment, discomfort, and anxiety that tend to go with disclosing personal sexual intimacy to a relative stranger. I noted in my field notes how a few participants came across as embarrassed and this was particularly true for the younger participants in the sample. One couple got so nervous when discussing the intimacy collage that they moved onto the next collage. Although most couples did indicate that sex and sexual intimacy were significant factors within their relationship sexual intimacy was frequently talked about as something that waned over time, where couples went through phases - ups and downs. Sex required time, effort, and commitment which couples often found challenging during periods of stress. For example, Liam said *'it's hard to perform when you're trying to balance studying and homework and you're running your own business and you know getting essays in, trying to plan out a proposal for the future.'* Liam's choice of words indicates how couples can view sexual intimacy as a performance – an act which can be measured by degrees of accomplishment. As other research findings (Heaphy et al., 2013) have shown, discussions of sexual intimacy have the potential to cause anxiety or

feelings of failure. In the TTC study, I was particularly attuned to these possibilities and ensured that all interviews adhered to appropriate ethical codes of conduct (see Chapter 3).

All couples described how the amount of sexual intimacy was high in the beginning of a relationship where connection, desire, and attraction were being established and communicated. As time passed the levels of sexual activity decreased and the emotional aspect and physical affection within the relationship deepened. This emotional-physical relationship rebalancing corroborates findings from previous studies on sexual intimacy (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Heaphy et al., 2013; Weeks et al., 2001). Peaks and troughs in sexual intimacy were not always experienced as problematic, with such fluctuations recognised as a natural occurrence within long-term relationships where the busyness of life might get in the way of frequent sexual activity.

Vincent: 'In your 20s sex used to be it yea, but it's not about that

Carl: We're actually quite lazy about sex aren't we? We are quite lazy about it (both laugh)

Vincent: We're tired

Carl: Do you know what I mean, but I actually don't think it's an important defining factor of a relationship, it's not one of those things where I'm like, right the last time we had sex was 7 days ago, we need to pencil it on for here, because it's not a defining factor of our relationship, if it happens, it happens, if it doesn't, it doesn't, it doesn't mean I love him any less'

[Couple Interview]

Carl and Vincent describe how age can be an important factor surrounding sexual intimacy within long-term relationships. As two of the oldest participants within the TTC study (aged 36 and 37 respectively), their talk about sex is bound to their busy working lives, their age, the nature and context of their relationship, and their individual biographies. Both Carl and Vincent spoke of having painful previous relationships. In contrast they discuss their own relationship as a

companionate and happy one built on mutual values, desires, friendship, and connection. In their 'crazy years', when they were younger, sex was of greater importance within relationships. This supports findings on young people and sex (Banker et al., 2010; Forrest, 2010). Now their relaxed attitude regarding sexual intimacy means that love, commitment, and desire for one another are expressed through other means and forms of intimacy. Sex is a secondary order (Gabb & Fink, 2015); it is part of intimacy and a practice of intimacy but intimate closeness is not contingent upon sexual activity.

Data such as these demonstrate the complexity of the relationship between sex and love, where sex can show love but that love means more than sexual intimacy. Although many couples in the study recognised the lesser role of sex in relationships, a number of participants still suggested that sex was a requirement within relationships. For example, Shane said how he '*loved his partner for who he is, not for the sex*' but added the rejoinder that physical affection '*bides you over until you do actually, do have further intimacy than just a kiss and a cuddle.*' Such comments suggest that although couples could accommodate having less sex in comparison to the beginning of their relationships, it remained something they desired – at least ideally.

Some areas of conflict were evident in accounts of sexual intimacy. Desire and attraction were typically interlinked with ideas of deeper emotional intimacy, situated in the context of the everyday lives of couples. Busy lives, as Liam and Rose have shown, are not immediately conducive to sexual intimacy; both take time and time is a limited resource, as discussed in Chapter 4. The significance of relationship duration is also crucial in how such conflicts were understood and experienced. The majority of couples who perceived a lack of sex as unproblematic had been together for 2-4 years. These couples were, therefore, in a relatively new relationship. However, couples who had longer relationships tended to recognise the need for regular sexual intimacy. For instance, Jeremy and his partner of 11 years implemented a rule of having sex at least once a week. They initiated this as a deliberate strategy to keep them

emotionally and physically close and to ensure they privileged time together. Research on sex and relationships (Heaphy et al., 2013; Mackey et al., 1997) has shown that the significance of sex typically decreases over time, whereas findings from the TTC study indicate that for younger LGB couples the opposite appears to be true. This needs to be situated within the sample where the longest relationship was 11 years. Nonetheless, it provides telling information that sex is seen as important for younger LGB couples. Sexual intimacy signifies an effort and a commitment to the couple relationship, serving to meet the needs of partners and conveying continued attraction. Accounts were often shrouded in the ebb and flow of conflict and uncertainty around sexual intimacy *throughout the years*. Working at sex appeared to be associated with working at, and a commitment to, the relationship. It is perhaps therefore not that more or less sex was happening but that the meanings of sex in younger LGB couples' relationships are distinctively nuanced. Sex was a barometer of relationship satisfaction, and in this sense it could be perceived as both a celebration of relationships and a tribulation couples needed to traverse.

For some participants, sexual intimacy became a problematic area, and for Lucille it was an ongoing problem within her eight year relationship.

Lucille: 'Um is our sex life, there's a bit of an imbalance of need there in a way because um, I like it as often as possible, whereas [Partner] can go for quite some time without it and not bat an eyelid. Um, for the first three years of our relationship it was top notch, it was very good, um but after then, I kind of come to realise that I was the one that instigated sex, a lot more than she did, and I got to the point where I thought I'm going to step back and going to allow her to instigate sometimes because I want that sense of feeling like she wants me, rather than her doing it because I'm initiating it, so I took a step back, actually rather than her instigating it, she just didn't do anything at all, very often. As a result it reduced the frequency

of us being intimate together, um and that's kind of become more and more apparent over the years.' **[Individual Interview]**

Lucille is keenly aware of how experiences of sexual practice within relationships can be difficult when expectations, desire, and needs differ. Such differences can adversely affect a relationship. She repeats the common perception that a high frequency of sex is associated with the beginning of relationships and the negative impact of waning sexual activity is transposed onto her relationship dynamic. Differences between the two women lead Lucille to test her partner – stepping back to see how she would respond. Cultural scripts surrounding sex appear to drive sexual expectations (Heaphy et al., 2013); her personal needs are not being met which has lead her to look to socio-cultural ideals around sexual compatibility and levels of sexual activity for an answer (Barker, 2013). Her partner's lack of initiation is thereby interpreted as disconnection. Lucille's conflicted feelings around sexual discord in her relationship can thus be traced to dissonance between her ideals, cultural expectations, and her actual experiences of sexual intimacy. This demonstrates the intersection of personal and cultural messages. Desiring and initiating sexual intimacy is seen to symbolise interest in and attraction for the other person, with a lack of sexual intimacy suggesting that these dimensions are lacking and creating potential insecurities within the relationship. This reasserts the importance of mutuality and reciprocity within relationship experiences for their continuation (Gabb & Fink, 2015). This has been outlined as important within participant accounts throughout the analysis and is a point to which I return in Chapter 8. Sexual intimacy, then, serves as an important connector within long-term relationships, aiding and maintaining intimacy and the relationship itself.

Lucille: '...and it's still a standing problem now and we have got a fantastic relationship and we are really happy together and that is far more important than the physical side, but I do feel the physical side is very important as well. Um, but as a result of that physical distance, I've found in the last couple of years that I've began to sort

of fantasise about other people a lot more often, I'm a bit more flirtatious to other people than I used to be, um and also I feel like I've got so used to not having sex with her, I kind of don't want to with her anymore... but that need is still very strong in me, so I'm kind of, I'm not struggling with fidelity but I am, my eyes are averting a little bit and we have been really open about it, we have spoken about it, and we are working on it.'

[Individual Interview]

Lucille conveys the complexity of the dynamics of sexual intimacy, where the physical distance that she experiences within her relationship is a consequence of a perceived mismatch of sexual intimacy. The lack of reassurance and interest from her partner adversely impacts Lucille's feelings of security and leads her to question their relationship in particular ways. However, she maintains that their underlying happiness, and fundamentally their relationship is experienced as working because they are 'working on it'. Whilst she is unhappy with the level of sexual intimacy in her relationship, she is happy with her relationship overall, something which is similar to other studies (Gabb & Fink, 2015). This indicates that happiness in relationships is perhaps more contingent upon emotional and physical connection than sexual intimacy. Problems in sexual intimacy may be traced to wider emotional problems within the relationship. This was evidenced by the earlier example, when Veronica said that she shies away from her partner physically if there is something wrong in their relationship. This shows how sex and emotions have a complicated attachment. They often intertwine through intimate practices; in other instances they can, however, be quite separate. For example, Carl and Vincent (above) expressed how a lack of sex did not mean a lack of love. For Lucille and her partner tensions around sexual intimacy work to open up channels of communication between the two women with respect to their relationship rules and feelings about monogamy and fidelity.

There are important factors of time and space to consider. Although Lucille maintains that she is happy, the lack of sexual intimacy is clearly creating emotional distance *over time* resulting in

waning desire for her partner. Without affirmations of emotional closeness which allow feelings of love and desire to be communicated the dyadic boundaries of this couple's relationship begin to break down. There are evident parallels here to the meanings and experiences of everyday mundane tasks, as discussed in Chapter 4. Ordinary gestures represent investment in the relationship and in each other (Gabb & Fink, 2015), but when these do not happen conflict can arise. It is not yet known whether this is a positive development that enriches this couple's relationship or a transitional move that serves to undermine it. What is perhaps clearer is that couples are able to accommodate diminished sexual intimacy over shorter periods of time but prolonged periods without sex and a lack of satisfaction can become problematic. On these occasions open communication about rules, fidelity, and relationship dynamics become necessary to sustain the couple. Many accounts of intimacy, particularly sexual intimacy, allowed exploration of relationship rules, particularly those associated with monogamy and non-monogamy.

7.5.2 Sex and Relationship Rules

As mentioned, sex and sexual intimacy comprised a *part* of intimacy *within* a relationship. For many couples there were salient distinctions between the sexual, physical, and emotional dimensions of their relationship. Although the distinctions existed, these forms of intimacy remained connected through intersecting dynamics and contexts. A significant factor which affected these distinctions was biography, especially around relational ideologies and attitudes towards monogamy, fidelity, and desire.

The majority of participants within the TTC study were monogamous. There were, however, two non-monogamous couples. One gay male couple were in an open relationship, embarking on sexual encounters outside the primary relationship. Another gay male couple described themselves as polyfidelitous where they were open to (but not currently) including a third person in their relationship. In a third gay male couple, one partner had previous experience of non-

monogamous relationships and the other partner was theoretically open to non-monogamy but was not yet ready to consider any changes to their monogamous relationship. These couples in particular challenged rules around mononormativity, and some participants (even those in monogamous relationships such as Lucille) recognised the connections of emotions, attraction, and desire to sexual intimacy and relationship rules. The role of communication in such circumstances appeared crucial.

Isaac: 'Yeah. Um [pause...] well, we're both very honest about the fact that, um, emotions and impulses and feelings and instincts about other people don't go away just because you're in a relationship... I think the reason I got, er, a, sort of, liney face is because that's a positive thing but also it's a slightly negative thing, um, in terms of my experience, because, um, er, I've been in relationships where, if that situation had happened, um, and then I got talking to that person, um, it would be perfectly fine to bring that person back to our flat or, um, go to his flat or whatever...Um, so sometimes I feel a little bit like it's almost a missed opportunity... Sometimes that feels a little bit sad. I don't know. I think that it's one of those good kinds of sad that means you've made a nice decision in your life about what you're going to do and not going to do, and I don't see it as particularly bad, in the long-term, that those tiny little doors have closed, because a great big door has opened..'

[Individual Interview]

Isaac is talking here about an attractive person at his workplace who he was flirting with and the resultant emotions and feelings he recorded on his emotion map. He alludes to how having a monogamous relationship is a choice, where the rules of the relationship are actively decided upon by the individuals within it. Isaac and his partner, although monogamous, talk openly of desire, attraction, and sexual thoughts about other people. Their relationship rules provide a safe and unthreatening space for expression of these desires. They use discourses around 'natural

drive' to explore this without threatening the relationship security or the trust between them. They see it as perfectly natural to find other individuals attractive even though they are in a relationship. What is important is that they adhere to the shared rules. If anything further was to happen it would breach the rules of their relationship and become problematic, particularly for Isaac's partner. Isaac displays considerable ambiguity in his account, with his assertion that he has missed opportunities suggesting that he would rather have an open relationship. However, his conciliatory attitude and his willingness to commit to a monogamous relationship indicate that he sees it as a compromise which he has accepted. Isaac rationalises his sexual desires for a non-monogamous relationship to maintain the intimacy within his monogamous one.

Ideas around monogamy, sex, and desire can be complicated within relationships. Consensus is not offered once and for all but requires open, continuous communication, particularly when there might be imbalances of power and/or desire for others. Isaac demonstrates how sex and emotions can be separated more easily for some individuals than for others. Complex connections can exist between sex and emotion and these require honest communication around relationship rules. This latter point is demonstrated by the couple in the open relationship.

Daniel: 'I think the honesty helps...I mean I would prefer if we didn't but...I also know that I wouldn't be able to remain faithful as well... Um...I think the only thing that puts me off it is the fact that [Partner] sometimes does get emotionally involved, um, that's the only bit that gets to me and puts me, kind of off it a little bit, cos I'm scared of losing him but, um, every time I say that to him, he's like don't worry that will never happen.'

Danni: So you'd prefer not to have an open relationship?

Daniel: I would prefer not to...And plus, if you're going behind each other's backs, there's more chance of um, something more developing because to cut down risk, you would meet the same person over and over again, and feelings could grow from

that. Um...where if you're open and honest about it then, um, you can say oh you've been with that person too many times now, um...you can control it more... but we're still intimate with each other and love each other just as much, even though we do have the open relationship.' **[Individual Interview]**

Daniel shows how open relationships are, for him, full of worries and insecurity around emotions, sex, and love. This echoes previous research on open relationships posing the potential for hurt feelings (Worth et al., 2002). The main difference in their relationship compared to those relationships defined as monogamous is the relationship rules associated with sex and sexual intimacy. For Daniel and his partner their open relationship permits casual sexual encounters outside of the primary couple as long as there are no emotional attachments, and the couple come home to each other. Intimacy to this couple is about togetherness and the connection between them, and sex remains outside of this remit. The meaning of sex for Daniel and his partner is one of desire and need fulfilment, whereas sexual intimacy within their relationship is attached to love and emotions. Daniel portrays a level of reflexive awareness about this when describing his recognition that the relationship needs to be open for the maintenance and security of it to persist in the long-term.

Relationship stability only becomes a source of apprehension when the emotional intimacy and source of connection between Daniel and his partner may be replicated with other sexual partners, and the trust and rules within the relationship are in danger of being broken. The open relationship can be seen as a means to shore up the connection of the emotional couple through open and honest communication around sexual activity outside of the relationship. This highlights the role of disclosing intimacy as a characteristic of intimate partnerships and an approach through which closeness can be achieved (Jamieson, 1998). The role of communication is paramount for Daniel because, he reasons, if the relationship was monogamous and the communication was not open and honest, it would decrease the likelihood of emotional closeness

and intimacy. This could conversely threaten the relationship through infidelity. This supports research which argues that suppression of desire and secrecy heightens thoughts around infidelity (Wenzlaff & Wegner, 2000), and that infidelity is not just a breach of monogamy but of relationship rules (Blow & Hartnett, 2005; Moller & Vossler, 2014). It demonstrates how relationship rules are a resource which couples can draw on to support their relationship, and thus addresses the third sub-question of the research on relationship resources.

The worries mentioned by Daniel and the implicit notions of power and insecurity surrounding monogamy, sex, and love in Isaac's interview, provide further insight into gay male stereotypes and their hyper-sexual association with open relationships (Bricker & Horne, 2007; Buunk & Dijkstra, 2004; Holm et al., 2001). On the surface, it would appear that the gay men in this research are reinforcing stereotypes, as they were more likely to be in an open relationship and appeared more able to separate sex and emotions (Bricker & Horne, 2007; Worth et al., 2002). However, all the male couples valued emotional intimacy and four of the six couples were in monogamous relationships, with three of these expressing staunch ideals of explicit monogamy. The conflict around fidelity within Lucille's account indicates that some female couples similarly valued sexual intimacy. There is, therefore, evidence to contradict stereotypes of hyper-sexualised gay men counterpoised with sexless lesbian relationships (Weeks et al., 2001). It represents another way in which research on gender has been complicated by participants' narratives, and is discussed in Chapter 8.

Examining the worries and apprehension inherent in participant accounts of relationship rules, fidelity and trust opens up fruitful avenues for developing relationship support. On one occasion, during one of the focus groups, a counsellor from Relate spoke of an example where the fears and worries of Daniel were realised within a gay male couple who were engaged in relationship support with her clinical practice.

Alice: *'One gay male couple who were very promiscuous and had lots of... they wouldn't call it relationships but sex with other people outside their civil partnered relationship and one of them really struggled with that when it got beyond a certain point he felt that was unacceptable...you know that's different to work with yea.'*

[Focus Group 2]

Alice points to the potential consequences a lack of communication and an over-emotional involvement with another person can have for a non-monogamous relationship. The trust and security of the open relationship of the gay male couple described by Alice come under pressure when their rules are perceived as having been breached. Ongoing communication therefore plays a crucial role. Alice acknowledges that open relationships are different to work with, as the interlinked relationships between sex, love, and intimacy within open relationships challenge monogamy and the associated 'scripts' of practising and doing intimacy (Barker, 2013; Munson & Stelboun, 1999). In such instances, framing rules can become important in making sense of how emotions are negotiated within the couple when one party engages in sex outside of the relationship (Hochschild, 1979). Emotions such as jealousy and sexual possessiveness may be reframed in open relationships (Ritchie & Barker, 2006), but they can still be present when the relationship rules are broken and intimate boundaries are breached.

The fundamental point is that regardless of the relationship rules (such as monogamous or non-monogamous), participants and couples in the research became most anxious about relationship stability when the emotional closeness and couple connection was insecure. Therefore, these two forms of partnership are markedly similar. Exploring the connections of sex, emotions, and love through accounts such as those by Isaac, Daniel, and Alice, demonstrates how sex can be an integral part of intimacy due to the emotional reinforcement of trust it provides. These accounts contradict and complicate gender stereotypes which portray men as less emotional (Holm et al.,

2001). Thus, sex and sexual intimacy can be seen as intimate practices which facilitate couple connectivity in diverse ways, but could also be an area which causes disconnection.

7.6 Intimate Practices

This chapter so far has focused on the differing meanings and demarcations of intimacy for the younger LGB couples within the TTC study. Data have demonstrated how dimensions of intimacy maintain couple closeness and convey emotions, love, and commitment. This has shown how intimacy is a connector for couples wherein the emotional, physical, and sexual aspects combine in dynamic configurations for couples. Revisiting Josh's conceptualisation of intimacy at the beginning of this chapter, intimacy was hard to define because it was often 'done' or felt or sensed. In this section, I detail examples of intimate practices among couples, specifically those relating to food and the role of laughter and fun.

In Chapter 4 I introduced the concept of the 'relational present' and discussed how couples negotiated time within their everyday lives. Management of time in the 'relational present' enabled intimacy to be incorporated into everyday routines and embedded into the fabric of the couple relationship. Through this couples could 'practice' intimacy; it was part of their everyday lives together and many participants in this research actively 'made time' for intimacy. Many participants discussed how there were several aspects of intimacy practiced in the everyday that were connected to time and space. Most couples noted how they would say 'I love you' every day and make time for each other by enjoying mutual activities together. This provided an opportunity for communication and support. Participants' talk around food provided another example of this. It often focused on meal time and on spending time together, in everyday routines, at home, or going out to eat in restaurants. Eating together and having shared interests in food allowed couples to feel close to one another.

Anna: 'Intimacy, yay food!'

Jennie: Yea (laughs) yea why have we put food on the intimacy one?

Anna: Because we like food and if food gives us a feeling of...

Jennie: Togetherness

Anna: Togetherness, Sundays with breakfast and cheese and it just makes us feel, cos we like that we go and pick up cheesy things and intimacy is not just about physical things. It's like, we feel together, sort of you know, this little cocoon type thing, we get some cheese and nibbly bits and we may or may not put on a movie, but we sit on the sofa together and go, oh do you like this one? Oh this is a lovely cheese, let's write this down in the book for next time!'

[Couple Interview]

In discussing their intimacy photo collage, Anna and Jennie pointed to an image of cheese, coffee and other food items. For this couple food is a mutual pleasure and shared interest which facilitates shared time together and reinforces the couple dynamic. The time they invest with each other enjoying food enables the couple to reaffirm their compatibility and the strength of their relationship. Their mutual enjoyment enables the couple to spend time solely with each other where there are no external interruptions or responsibilities to distract them. Food allows complete investment in one another, through sharing an activity and having meaningful time for intimate togetherness. It represents a way Anna and Jennie can feed their relationship; where it is a source of literal and symbolic nourishment (Gabb & Fink, 2015).

The process of writing down the cheeses they like in their book also allowed the couple to have a physical manifestation of this togetherness and intimacy, providing a material record and reassurance of their continued successful relationship. Returning to this book and/or adding to it serves as a resource for the couple to create a relationship story through which they can display the couple dynamic (Finch, 1984; Gabb & Fink, 2015). For this couple, food and their associated behaviours around food are practices through which the two women can mirror their mutual feelings of love, care, and commitment. It is a means of reinforcing their couple identity and was a

prominent pattern among participants. Busy lives often required couples to juggle many responsibilities, and as such, meal times and eating out at restaurants were often cherished because of the togetherness fostered on these occasions. These were activities to be enjoyed where couple happiness could be maintained and cultivated, and descriptions of joy and happiness such as these played a prominent role in couples' depictions of a good relationship. Couples frequently emphasised their desire to have fun and laugh together, and, as mentioned in Chapter 5, happiness was extremely important to couples in the TTC study. In this respect, it is both an important relationship resource and an intimate practice for couples.

*Beth: 'Can't wait for my girl to come home!! I crave lots of laughter after work and she has plenty. *Which makes me realise I have never been in a relationship where I laugh so much. It really is "The music of the soul" We literally LAUGH every day!! This is one of the major aspects of our relationship I think? And there are many!!'*

'[Partner] performing some awkward dance stark bollock naked!!! NOT SEXY. BUT bloody hilarious!!! <3 her!' **[Diary]**

Beth, in her diary, describes the importance of laughing within her relationship, which has a positive healing effect on her well-being, helping to combat the stress from her job. In this sense, both the laughter and her partner are a vital source of support for Beth, something that she did not experience in previous relationships. This echoes how the past can inform the present (as outlined in Chapter 4). Again, Beth touches upon how practices of intimacy are ever-present in the everyday. Laughter and fun, then, reinforce the happiness Beth feels with her partner, and her sense of comfort and support within the partnership, echoing other findings relating to social support (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). This displays how aspects of time, space, and intimacy can be woven together in participant accounts as a means of understanding relationship experiences. The relationship is a happy and positive one because it is filled with mutual love, care, and

support. Such relationship qualities maintain a level of emotional intimacy between the couple, emphasising the couple dynamic, intimate closeness, and mutual support. Beth describes this level of satisfaction with her relationship through many different dimensions of their relationship, of which intimacy is only one. Acts like the awkward dance which create laughter and the sense of fun involved also serve as a connector between the couple. This embodied practice enhances Beth's feelings of love for her partner and through this her relationship is sustained and maintained.

This notion of fun and laughter was also a major contributor to participants' appraisal of relational fit. It seemed many couples recognised the need to have fun together through shared interests, shared outlooks, and appreciating partner identity, which included a partner's sense of humour. For example, *'I just, I just find her like endlessly fun to be around'* (Elena) and *'I've explored places with other people but it doesn't seem as fun if you're not there'* (Chloe). Most participant accounts were humorous and many couple interviews were full of 'couple banter' (Gabb & Fink, 2015). This was particularly the case among the youngest couples within the TTC study. Field notes often included times when I had very funny interviews and I talk in my field notes about how these types of interviews were enjoyable to conduct. Couples often made fun of each other, made sarcastic and light-hearted remarks, and used humour to broach potentially awkward subjects and topics such as differences in opinion and minor tensions surrounding divisions of labour. This supports research findings about LGB couples using humour in conflict management (Grinnell, 2008). It also facilitated couple closeness through reinforcing the couple dynamic and providing couple support. Laughter and humour thus also aided communication, particularly around conflict and differences within their relationships.

7.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored intimacy and intimate practices in couple relationships and detailed how intimacy comprises emotional, physical, and sexual dimensions. Intimacy is

something that is not simply communicated, but also 'done' in relationships. Intimacy is thus spoken, felt, sensed, *and* seen. In the emotional intimacy section, consideration of the couple dynamics and identities enabled interrogation of how couples complemented each other, were compatible, and felt comfortable and accepted for their individuality. Displaying the concepts of intimate closeness through deep knowing and the 'couple team', the chapter elucidated how participants developed ways of communicating and conveyed support and care through emotional intimacy. It was demonstrated that physical intimacy communicated practices of love and care and bridged emotional and sexual intimacy. Regular physical intimacy enabled couples to stay close and connected, and provided affirmation and reassurance of personal feelings. Meanings, definitions, and the role of sexual intimacy within participant relationships were explored. Unpicking definitions of sexual intimacy led to examination of how sex could be experienced as uncomfortable and a source of anxiety, and how perceptions were bound up in personal sexual experiences. Sexual intimacy was mostly seen as of a 'secondary order' by couples, who accepted peaks and troughs in physical closeness. Prolonged periods without sexual intimacy could sometimes develop into problems for some participants. Narratives around sexual intimacy and relationship rules highlighted how sex could be seen as separate from emotions, could be linked to relationship stability, and could be viewed as an intimate practice which cultivates emotional connectedness. The intimate practices section discussed how couples spoke of 'doing' intimacy. Food and laughter represented a relationship connector for couples, promoting feelings of togetherness, mutual commitment, love and support. Throughout, experiences of intimacy were linked to time and space, demonstrating that my analysis identifies these as crucial to exploring relationship experiences of couples in maintaining and sustaining their long-term relationships. The intersections of everyday, intimate practices and partner support display how intimacy can address all the sub-questions of the research. It is therefore a vital relationship experience *and* resource for couples. In the final chapter I provide conclusions for the research, including the key findings and directions for the future.

Chapter 8 : Conclusion

8.1 Situating the TTC Study

This research has explored the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples in the UK whilst extending current knowledge about the relationships of young adults and LGB individuals and couples. In this conclusion I summarise and synthesise the research. I begin by locating the TTC study within the existing literature, discussing the links to my research questions including the iterative process of their development, and the data analysis. I present the main findings of the research and their significance for examining issues of age, reciprocity, relationship resources, and gender. Throughout I outline how the research questions of the thesis have contributed to furthering understanding of younger LGB couple relationship experiences. In the final sections I examine potential directions for future research and provide some personal reflections on the research.

The overarching research question of the TTC study was to explore the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples in the UK. In Chapter 1 I introduced the rationale and research evidence which framed the examination of this research question. By concentrating on the *relationship experiences* of younger LGB adults in the UK I have been able to address these gaps in the literature. The attention to the literature allowed me to build upon three key studies which have informed the TTC study (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Heaphy et al., 2013; Henderson et al., 2007). Drawing on these studies facilitated an exploration of the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples without privileging one aspect of their identity over another (for example, sexual orientation, age, or relationship status) and enabled me to expand on recent research on young LGB couples in civil partnerships (Heaphy et al., 2013). This has extended study into relationships in their own right and increased knowledge of the relationships of younger LGB couples. It has also reinforced how, like other research in this field, multiple methods are able to access multi-dimensional intimate relating behaviours. Acknowledging this existing work permitted greater understanding of these

diverse relationship experiences by outlining the important aspects of biography that could inform (similar and differing) relationship experiences alongside socio-cultural and temporal influences.

Recognising the contexts of experience not only situated the relationship experiences of the younger LGB couples but allowed me to examine the first sub-question of the research, about participant understandings of long-term and happy relationships. These contexts included the introduction of same-sex marriage legislation alongside increased visibility and acceptance of LGB individuals in the current zeitgeist of the UK and in popular culture. I was able to interrogate the role of time in understandings of long-term and happy relationships in my analysis, and to explore relationship practices throughout the thesis.

By focusing on relationship practices in my examination of how couples experienced their relationships in the everyday, I was able to address the second sub-question of the research about the ways couples negotiate and manage their everyday lives together. These relationship practices were presented in Chapter 2 and I examined them using the lens of the relational present throughout my analysis. Practices included the impact of legal recognition on relationships, such as same-sex marriage and civil partnership; the effect and experiences surrounding children, parenting and family planning; the role of the home and the division of labour; intimacy within relationships; conceptions of love; and relationship rules. Considering practices in this way warranted exploration of how socio-cultural scripts could inform everyday relationship practices, such as reinforcing commitment and/or providing a sense of couple validation through legal recognition. This focus reinforced the merits of attending to 'practices' and the ways in which couples 'do' relationships (Gabb & Fink, 2015), providing insight into the minutiae of how couples sustained their relationships.

The third sub-question of the research concentrated on the resources available to support and sustain the relationships of participants. In Chapter 1 I covered these by looking at the relationship support context. I furthered this discussion in Chapter 2 and throughout my analysis of the data. Exploring the literature enabled me to identify the resources available to support participant relationships and to demonstrate how family and friends were a crucial presence in couples' everyday experiences. Counselling and relationship support services provided an additional example of an avenue for supporting younger LGB couple relationships. In Chapter 6 I interrogated these external resources through ideas of relational spaces and public/private boundaries. The focus groups with the Relate counsellors added another view of relationship support which enhanced the LGB couple data. It also provided the thesis with an applied dimension and I have thus been able to increase understanding of relationship support services and the potential issues and experiences for which support might be needed.

Although I have separated the research questions here, they are inherently linked to one another through the overarching exploration of relationship experiences and through the conceptual themes forming the analysis. The process of developing the research questions however was iterative. The interconnections between the questions under the umbrella of relationship experiences and the implications for analysis involved an evolution of my own ideas. This progression was informed by reviewing the existing literature, reflecting on the experiences of completing fieldwork, and through analysing the data from both LGB couples and Relate counsellors (for these developments on research questions, see Appendix 11). As a result, I was able to connect my areas of interest, including LGB couples, relationships, context, and relationship support, whilst situating them within existing literature. This enabled a clear view of the contributions of the TTC study to relationship research into younger LGB couples. Guided by the research questions, the multiple methods of the research (detailed in Chapter 3) facilitated exploration of the nuances of participants' relationship experiences. Combined, the innovative emphasis on visual and digital dimensions of the fieldwork with the LGB couples, and the

individual and couple interview data, provided a contextualised snapshot of the multifaceted relating behaviours in participants' everyday lives.

8.2 Discussion of Key Findings

This thesis has argued that the concepts of time, space, and intimacy are crucial to understanding the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples. The methodology enabled access to the 'messiness' of relationship experiences (Gabb, 2009), with the diverse dimensions of relationship experience opened up through different methods. For example, the diaries demonstrated the intersections of time and intimacy, and the emotion maps afforded exploration of space. Throughout I highlighted connections between the findings chapters in order to illustrate how the relationship experiences of couples are not easily demarcated. The study has shown that there is considerable overlap in understandings of relationship experiences. Conceptions of time and space are multiple, they often occur simultaneously, and are inextricably linked. Narratives of time are embedded in spatial dimensions and discussions of space are rooted in temporality. Intimate practices are entrenched in time and space where they occur in everyday routines, change over time, and differ depending on the meanings of the space within which they occur. Attending to time and space increases understanding of how couples facilitate intimate closeness, experience togetherness, and overcome the trials and tribulations they are faced with. This, in turn, evidenced how couples could continue their relationships through the relationship work embedded in the everyday.

A central aspect of how couples made their relationships work and understood them as working is the contexts of the specific couples. I have maintained throughout that relationship experiences are bound by the interplay of the biographical, socio-cultural, and temporal contexts of the individuals and couples. This arguably creates the couple diversity in relationship experiences noted herein. Recognising couple diversity in this way is fundamental in appraising and understanding the nuances of relationship experiences. I have demonstrated through individual

situated accounts how 'relational ideologies' (Ringer, 2001), 'biographical anchors' (Heaphy et al., 2013), and relational scripts (Heaphy et al., 2013; Simon & Gagnon, 1987) can inform narratives. For example, past parental conflict affects conflict management in the relational present. Despite these notions of individual relationship experiences and couple diversity there are some compelling conclusions to be drawn across the sample which further extend understanding of younger LGB couple relationship experiences. These involve the effects of age, the importance of reciprocity, acknowledging the impact of relationship resources, and inferences about gender.

8.2.1 Age Cohort Experiences

In Chapters 1 and 2 I highlighted research on how age can impact relationship experiences. This included how younger LGB individuals tended to have higher rates of mobility which affects support networks (Henderson et al., 2007), and how the average age of marriage and having children is increasing (Walker et al., 2010). The findings of the TTC study indicate that age can, and does, interact with many relationship experiences.

In exploring the first sub-question of the research, participant meanings of long-term relationships were bound to age and relationship length. Younger participants (approximately under 30) who had been together for a shorter amount of time (under three or four years) tended to use definitions of long-term that encompassed intentions for the future. Older participants (mostly over 30) who had been together longer (five to 11 years) talked of long-term as the length of time together. All participant relationship experiences were, however, more complex than considering age and relationship duration alone would imply. Intersections with time, and the future in particular, and with socio-cultural notions of 'growing up' and 'settling down' in relationships were pertinent to participant understandings of long-term and happy relationships. The majority of participant accounts of their relationship experiences in the relational present were directed towards building a life together. The future was central to couples maintaining their relationships *for the long-term*, which followed certain 'stages' or 'rites of passage' signifying

maturing into adulthood. These stages included marriage or civil partnership, having children and/or pets, buying homes, achieving career aspirations, and/or having holidays. This in turn facilitated feelings of mutual security and commitment in the relational present.

Analysing ideas about the future in participants' accounts of their relationships permitted examination of the 'pure relationship' (Giddens, 1992) and the fragility of contemporary relationships (Giddens, 1991; Smart, 2007). This attention to the future also extended understanding of civil partnership (Heaphy et al., 2013; Shipman & Smart, 2007) and same-sex marriage, and LGB family planning and children (Heaphy et al., 2013; Nordqvist, 2012; Weeks et al., 2001). The discussions and meanings of stages, particularly marriage/civil partnership and family planning, in participant accounts were embedded in the zeitgeist of increasing LGB acceptance in the UK. When it came to marriage, the couples in civil partnerships tended to be the older participants in the sample while the younger couples discussed marriage as a possibility but had no concrete plans. This was not always the case as the oldest couple in the sample did not want to get married. The majority of participants talked of assimilation into society because access to legal recognition enabled them to feel as though their relationships were ordinary and 'normal'. These feelings about the ordinariness of their relationships were reinforced when interrogating plans around children and parenting.

As noted in Chapter 3, no couples has children, nevertheless, there were rich accounts of family planning and imaginings of parenthood by the participants. There were also multifaceted interactions in these accounts with the socio-cultural context. Couples of all ages were acutely aware, for example, of the potential for problems around parenthood and parenting, with worries of children being bullied, or foreseeable difficulties in IVF or donor conception, surrogacy or adoption. This supported previous findings on LGB couples and family planning (Fitzgerald, 2010; Heaphy et al., 2013; Nordqvist, 2012; Patterson, 2008). Nonetheless, all couples discussed having children as an option regardless of the difficult logistical problems this entailed. Such patterns in

the data evidence a generational experience related to the age cohort. Marriage and children being considered as options marks a significant contrast to previous generations of LGB couples, as ideas of marriage and experiences of LGB parenthood were previously fraught with marginalisation and discrimination (Weeks et al., 2001). Participants in the TTC study have grown up in a more tolerant society in which marriage and having children are understood to be *available* and *probable* experiences and are greatly desired by the majority of them.

Exploring relationship experiences in their everyday lives through the second sub-question allowed the feelings of ordinariness and ‘normality’ of their relationships to be upheld. Looking at the relational present explicated the ways participants were engaging in the everyday tasks which *most* people do in relationships. Notions of relationship work became relevant, and cultural narratives of relationships ‘needing work’ were salient. Couples were engaging in a process of management of mundane responsibilities which could cause tensions. This is another finding which can be associated with the generational experience of the cohort. The younger LGB couples are no longer emphasising their creativity or distinctiveness (Weeks et al., 2001) because of the assimilation and validation of their relationships in socio-cultural contexts. Instead, participants conveyed how their relationships were full of ups and downs, just like everyone else’s.

A significant finding relating to how relationship experiences involve peaks and troughs surrounds sexual intimacy. Most couples echoed sentiments from other research findings positing that sex was of a ‘secondary order’ within relationships (Gabb & Fink, 2015). Couples in the TTC study accepted that sexual intimacy could come in phases and spoke of the role of sex *within* intimate practices. Several participants, however, spoke of the critical role sex played in connecting couples, where its complete absence or sexual dissonance signified problems in the relationship. In particular, sex was an indicator of relationship satisfaction where its significance appeared to increase over time. This is an important finding, not reflected in other research on sex and relationships (Heaphy et al., 2013; Mackey et al., 1997) and may be a telling experience of the age

cohort. This point is even more salient as the oldest couple in the sample (who were 36 and 37) downplayed the role of sex in their relationship (see Chapter 7). This further exemplifies the effects of age on perceptions of sexual intimacy as younger participants were much more likely to see sex as important.

Alongside narratives of ups and downs in relationships there was a certain level of optimism surrounding the relationship continuing long-term. This sanguinity towards their relationships working in the future may come as a facet of the age cohort: the 'optimism of youth' (Sherwood et al., 2014). The participants in the TTC study are experiencing their relationships in a time of financial constraints, job insecurity, and difficulty getting onto the housing market, but, despite these challenging material circumstances, participants maintained a level of hopefulness within their relational presents and for their futures. Although couples had been through, or were currently going through, hard times, they were doing their best within their individual circumstances. This involved remaining positive and having faith in their relationship to work and to achieve future plans. Such positive outlooks allowed couples to orient themselves towards multiple futures in the face of the uncertainty of their lives (Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013), to overcome difficulties within their relationships, and to remain close in spite of challenging and constraining financial circumstances. It did not mean, though, that participants were unrealistic. As the discussions around relationship longevity in Chapter 5 displayed, participants were aware that their relationships might end in the future. Participants spoke positively of growing up in a culture of vast progressive changes for LGB individuals and indicated excitement about the multiple possibilities for their futures, despite the difficulties and worries of the present. The result is the production of multi-faceted accounts where the optimism of youth, positive socio-cultural changes, and the nature of temporal context combine as a distinctive experience of the younger LGB participants in the TTC study.

Thus, the age related cohort experiences can provide important insights into the lives of participants. Examining the research questions through looking at these experiences informs and contextualises relationship experiences more broadly and, at the same time, enhances understanding of the couples in the study.

8.2.2 Reciprocity

This section returns to the second sub-question of the research and considers how couples negotiated their everyday lives together. A major finding from the TTC study concerned the importance of the relational present for my analysis. Viewing all relationship experiences through this concept directed attention towards how relationship practices were entrenched within everyday lived experiences. A key component to understanding these experiences is reciprocity.

In Chapter 4 attending to the relational present facilitated further understanding of the division of labour (Oerton, 1997; Weeks et al., 2001), navigating everyday tasks with work commitments and desire for time as a couple, and the relationship work couples do in everyday situations (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Smart, 2007). My analysis around personal autonomy in this chapter offered insight into how couples maintain a balance between individuality and couple identity. In Chapter 5 I illustrated how couples talked of shared future plans, and in Chapter 6 I discussed how the home was not just a shared space for the couple but also a space where relationship practices were embedded. In Chapter 7 I interrogated the couple dynamic, established my concept of separate togetherness, and demonstrated how the intimate practices of food and laughter conveyed closeness, 'deep knowing' (Jamieson, 1998), and togetherness. Reciprocity was vital at these times.

The mutuality of the acts embedded in the everyday relationship experiences communicated partner presence in the relationship. Achieving symmetry in relational values and engaging in emotion work to bridge differences in the couple dynamic was a reciprocal process. It enabled

couples to feel love, convey acceptance of one another, and provide practical aspects of care. Reciprocity served to connect couples in the present and to communicate commitment to a shared future, which served to bind couples to one another (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Mackey et al., 1997). In this sense, attending to reciprocity provided deeper understandings of long-term relationships. Such attention to the crucial role of reciprocity also affords support to theorising on the 'pure relationship' (Giddens, 1992) and the 'egalitarian ideal' (Weeks et al., 2001). Couples appear to be displaying a propensity for equal relationships based on mutual respect which comes under threat when the rewards of the relationship are not felt. Participant accounts, however, portray more complexity because there were times when inequalities persisted and mutuality was challenged. Throughout my analysis, I have discussed areas of conflict such as how couples bridge their differences including around the relationship work, division of labour, and communication styles. Compromise is fundamental to negotiating differences.

However, some participants were willing to accept and live with inequalities in particular aspects of relationship experience for temporary periods of time. Their accounts demonstrated the role of time as a resource within relationships and a recognition that disparities would balance out over time. Yet management of the acts in their everyday relationship experiences were not seen as reciprocal transactions. Couples did not portray a requirement to completely match each other on a point scoring basis. Rather, it is the reciprocal nature of inequities which were seen as part and parcel of being in a long-term relationship. As such there needed to be *willingness* by both partners to work together and to pick up the slack if necessary. Difficulties arose when this inclination was missing from relationships thereby threatening relationship stability and commitment, particularly where inequalities were prolonged.

Reciprocity serves to connect couples in a number of ways through a mutual commitment to navigating their everyday lives together. The nature of exchanges rooted in the everyday also

offer insight into how partners can be a significant resource in sustaining the relationship, and for this reason, resources are the focus of the next section.

8.2.3 Relationship Resources

The notion of relationship support has been a mainstay of the TTC study through the investigation of the third sub-research question, which focused on the resources available to aid younger LGB couple relationships. Participant accounts, although optimistic, still contained instances of conflict where support was required. This assistance came from the participants themselves, from their partner (as illustrated above), or from trusted networks of family, friends or significant others. There were two lines to this support - everyday support within relationships which came from relationship practices, and support which was sought specifically when problems arose.

In my analysis of the relational present, I detailed how this first aspect of support came from everyday experiences including practical aspects of care and household tasks, and from communication, partner support, and connectedness within intimate practices. These findings corroborated understandings of concepts such as emotion work (Hochschild, 1979), communication (Gabb & Fink, 2015), and care and support (Reis, 2014; Tronto, 1998) in relationships. I also demonstrated how family and friends provided essential support within relationships. Significant others facilitated crucial time out for the couple, and individual time away from the relationship. Couples also spoke of receiving validation from loved ones and financial help to achieve goals such as buying a house. This exemplified how couples are embedded in webs of other relationships (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Smart, 2007) and reinforces literature on the significance of social support (Graham & Barnow, 2013; Kurdek, 2004, 2006). It also challenged ideas of fusion within LGB couple relationships (Peplau et al., 1996; Savin-Williams, 1996) and furthered discussions on temporal worries with finances (Hills et al., 2015; Kirk, 2014).

The second aspect of support comes from partners and the wider networks of relationships in times of distress and conflict. Partners engaged in active negotiations of the tensions and individual biographies could be drawn upon to inform couple scripts for relating. This included biographical anchors such as parental conflict management strategies and learning from past relationships (Heaphy et al., 2013). Thus, couples could use knowledge from previous experiences of other relationships in their lives to mediate difficulties. The presence of other people in their lives also provided participants with opportunities to talk about their troubles and offered a safe space for navigating distress. For example, they sought support from friends when experiencing negative parental reactions to coming out, asked family or friends for advice on mental health issues with a partner, or confided about sexual intimacy dissonances with friends.

In instances when participants believed more professional support was necessary, they sought couple counselling or therapy. Their accounts illustrated a willingness to negotiate problems to maintain the relationship or to use counselling as a means of validating relating behaviours and successfully overcoming differences. Although only a minority of participants had experience of using relationship support agencies, the majority of couples expressed openness to accessing services if needed. The focus group data enhanced understanding of the experiences of LGB couples when couple counselling is sought for relationship concerns. Participant accounts indicate there may be substance to ideas advanced in the focus groups with relationship support counsellors. Anxieties about breaching relationship rules in open relationships, and fears expressed around the difficult emotions of having a biological child were similarly present in counsellor participants' accounts of working with LGB couples. The findings suggest that the LGB couples are acutely aware of the potential difficulties which they might encounter, and consequently, they take steps to prevent these from occurring. They additionally demonstrate how some areas of tension can be universal where some issues are *relationship issues* which occur frequently among couples, such as inability or problems communicating emotions and

feelings. These might require professional relationship support if couples are unable to traverse them together or within their own networks.

Examining the resources for relationship support drawn on by participants extends understanding of the differing experiences associated with cultivating long-term relationships for younger LGB couples. These are vital to the many ways couples can feel supported in their relationships, not only in times of distress but also in their everyday lives. Aspects of care, love, validation, acceptance and presence are crucial in these feelings of support. The findings of this study therefore, resonate with previous research that suggests relationships are strengthened by partner support (Graham & Barnow, 2013; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998) and the presence of others outside of the relationship (Gabb & Fink, 2015; Sherwood et al., 2014). They contribute to and extend knowledge about LGB couples counselling, including how couples therapy can be a successful option for some (Lebow et al., 2012; Klann et al., 2011), but many couples perceive counselling as the final option for problems (Walker et al., 2010).

8.2.4 Gender

Another area which has been important throughout the thesis concerns gender. In Chapter 2 I highlighted research into the impact of gender differences on LGB couples. This involved the potential to attribute differences between male and female couples to gender, including variances in gender roles and socialisation, which have been criticised (Clarke et al., 2010; Dunne, 1999; Weeks et al., 2001). My research, with its emphasis on attending to context, has upheld a more multifarious view of relationship experiences associated with gender. This becomes particularly evident when examining family planning, emotions and sex, and the division of labour.

As stated, family planning was a salient aspect of the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples in the TTC study. In participant accounts of parenthood there are implications of gender

which go beyond previous findings. Heaphy et al. (2013) emphasised how male couples were more tentative in their accounts about having children than female couples. Whilst some participants' accounts echoed these findings, others contradicted them. For example, some male participants in this study expressed desires for children while some female participants did not want children at all. One female couple who were feminists and conservationists talked of not wanting to bring children into this world '*the way it is*'. A male participant talked of how family was important to him and he wanted to raise his children to have similar ideals. This supported findings related to maternal thinking (Ruddick, 2009) and gay and bisexual male parenthood (Langdridge, 2013). Thus, the findings associated with gender both extend and contradict previous research. There was a similar pattern displayed around intimacy, particularly concerning sex and emotions.

In Chapter 7 I challenged notions of gender, emotions, and sex. In particular, my analysis questioned stereotypes of male non-disclosure of emotions and feelings (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Mackey et al., 1997) because several male participants displayed a need for communication, emotional intimacy, and closeness. Gender differences around sex were also complicated. Some female participants expressed a need and desire for sex within their relationships, challenging notions of 'lesbian bed death' (Munsen & Stelboum, 1999), and male participants downplayed the importance of sex, thereby contradicting findings emphasising the high frequency of sex among men (Solomon et al., 2005). The couples in the study who spoke of being in or open to non-monogamous relationships, and being able to separate sex and emotions, were male. This indicates that the relationship experiences of some participants support gender stereotypes suggesting men are more likely to separate sex and emotions (Bricker & Horne, 2007), and that gay men have more open relationships (Worth et al., 2002). The bigger point here, though, is how relationship experiences and practices were highly individual, and thus the patterns could not be *reduced* to gender. The male couple in an open relationship still expressed emotional insecurities and a need for emotional closeness, and other male couples voiced

staunch explicit ideals around monogamy. Female couples still displayed instances of not talking, and placed importance on sexual intimacy, further challenging stereotypes around gender, sex, and emotions.

There were also other areas which contradicted previous research on gender (Carrington, 1999; Dunne, 1999) but were not covered in as much detail in the thesis. For example, when examining the division of labour, gender did not appear relevant. Instead, the ways couples overcame difficulties and negotiated the division of labour were down to the individual couples finding strategies that worked for their relationship. The more salient aspects of the division of labour concerned the juggling of responsibilities with time. Tensions occurred and were navigated through compromise and in the context of individual differences in participants' everyday lives. Gender was only a small part of this.

My research suggests then, that gender alone does not inform relating behaviours and practices. The picture is much more complex and, I would argue, examining gender discretely risks obscuring the diversity of relationship experiences displayed throughout the TTC study. However, the effects of gender on other relationship experiences, outside of those discussed in this section, could be a valuable focus for future research. The next section focuses on such potential future directions for the research.

8.3 Future Directions

My thesis has made a number of contributions to relationship research in the social sciences, particularly surrounding LGB couples and the relationships of young adults. However there are some limitations which open up certain avenues for future study. This section begins by talking about such limitations before discussing the possibilities for extending understandings of intimate relationships through relationship resources, the methodology and the data from the TTC study. Broader implications are then discussed.

The overarching research question of this thesis was to explore the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples in the UK. This broad focus and the use of multiple methods resulted in a multitude of data. Consequently, some areas of relationship experiences have not been explored in as much depth as others. My three related sub-questions, although covering a considerable amount of relationship practices, focused the research in a particular way. For example, attending to participants' understandings of long-term and happy relationships rather than analysing other meanings attributed to intimate relationships. Acknowledging the everyday negotiations of relationship experiences brought into view experiences of time and temporality but not in-depth explorations of the meanings and significance of work, sport, or hobbies. Addressing resources for relationship experiences and support meant that the nature of relationships outside of the couple have largely been framed in context of maintaining the couple relationship. Whilst this is clearly evidenced in the data, there are other understandings of the relationships with family members and friends such as the meanings placed upon these relationships, and how these relationships are maintained alongside the couple relationship. There were also limitations relating to sampling.

In Chapter 3, I mentioned problems with recruiting couples and the diversity of the sample. This may have been due to the recruitment strategy mainly involving targeting online communities and snowballing through other participants. The majority of participants were white British and educated to degree level, just over half of the sample were middle class, and no couples in the study had children. This undoubtedly had an effect on the shape of the analysis. For example, narratives around IVF for female couples typically came from participants with better access to financial resources along more traditional 'class' lines, and all participant accounts about experiences of parenthood are imagined. Despite these potential limitations of the sample, there are rich and detailed accounts relating to parenthood, family planning, and the home.

The shortcomings of the study then, provide opportunities for additional ways of analysing the data and further extending understandings of LGB relationships. I therefore intend to produce future publications based on this thesis and further analysis of some areas. The future is one such area I would like to consider in more detail. My aim is to explore the intersections between narratives of family planning, home-building, and travelling/holidays. This would further contribute to existing literature on LGB parenthood (Heaphy et al., 2013; Nordqvist, 2012, 2014; Weeks et al., 2001) and home-building (Gorman-Murray, 2006, 2008a). Participant accounts displayed how these areas were mostly embedded in the future, and often intertwined with financial resources along traditional 'class' lines. Couples spoke of how they may or may not be able to achieve their future plans based on their financial situations and access to the necessary resources. By extending my analysis beyond regarding the future as a resource or the spatial dimensions of the home, I will be able to consider how couples understand the multiple futures of their relationships and how finances and class might affect these imaginings and/or plans.

The emphasis of my third sub-question on exploring the relationship resources available for LGB couples served to link the LGB couple data with the Relate counsellor data. There is more scope for studying Relate counsellors' attitudes, understandings, and experiences, and how these shaped their work with LGB couples. I intend, therefore, to analyse the focus group data and produce a publication concentrating on LGB couple relationship support avenues. This opens up lines of inquiry which will extend my methodological insights into the data which were written up in my co-authored paper on the focus group process (Pearson & Vossler, submitted). The preliminary findings (used to illustrate methodological points in the paper) included how counsellors talked of approaching aspects of diversity and '*different differences*' in their practice, their thoughts on counsellor training regarding LGB couples, and their lack of experience in working with LGB couples. Analysing these data more closely will allow me to elaborate upon and develop existing knowledge on counsellor training (Shaw et al., 2012), counsellor understandings of LGB couples (Grove, 2009; Hunt & Fish, 2008), and attitudes towards service provision (Milton,

1998). Additionally, whilst Chapter 6 included data on relationship support, there remain further avenues for exploration of these data. In each of the couple interviews, participants without experience of couple counselling were asked about where they might go for professional support for their relationships. Examining this data in more detail will open up understanding of LGB counselling conceptions and preferences, serving to build upon existing literature on LGB couples' decisions around accessing relationship support services (Evans & Barker, 2010; Galgut, 2005; Hansen, 2005). This would allow me to develop implications for practitioners on working with LGB couples and, therefore, advance the contribution to the literature on relationship support made by this thesis.

A major finding and analytical theme of the study was time. The research questions have enabled a synchronic view of the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples rooted in context. Further research, by collecting new data from TTC participants, could introduce a diachronic element, thereby enabling exploration of relationship experiences longitudinally and also building on the methodology of the *Inventing Adulthoods* study (Henderson et al., 2007). This had been my original plan for the TTC study but it was not feasible within the scope of the project. Notwithstanding the time and costs of longitudinal studies, I built the potential for this approach into the research. Before participation, I asked for consent from participants to be contacted for further research if this became an option and verbally double checked this when debriefing them (see Appendix 1 for consent form). Adding a longitudinal dimension to the TTC study facilitates examination of the same cohort over and across time. It would enable exploration of shifts in the generational experiences of the participants and give insight into how relationship experiences change. These insights might include whether couples achieved any of their future desires for their relationships, and the circumstances surrounding success or difficulty in doing so.

The final avenues for future research directions arise from the methodology of the TTC study. There is space for exploring and evaluating the methodology in more depth, in a similar vein to

attending to the specific research issues presented by utilising couple *and* individual interviews (Heaphy & Einarsdottir, 2012). This would permit consideration of the ways in which the different methods can access diverse aspects of relationship experiences alongside participants engaging with them in numerous ways. Another methodological direction concerns the visual and digital data. Examples of these data were included throughout the thesis, but there is still room to analyse the distinctiveness of the visual and digital methods in a different way. I intend to produce a methodological paper evaluating the implications of how some participants used digital forms of technology, including social media, in their diaries and in their photo collages. The impact of age and generation could be interrogated further to explicate the ways in which technology is embedded in the everyday lives of young people. These would further develop an initial analysis which I presented at an innovative methods conference and enable exploration of how the methods implemented in the TTC study can be seen as age-appropriate and flexible.

These future directions for this research would reinforce the strengths of the methodology and the analysis, and ask some new questions of the data. However, the methodology employed, and the attention of the thesis towards relationship practices, whilst taking context into account has served to provide a foundation for future research outside of the TTC study. Further research could extend the conclusions of the research based on age, potentially exploring the role of optimism in relationships or by conducting more in-depth sex-related research into the relationships of younger couples. The flexibility of the methods enables them to be tailored to different age cohorts and shows how they can access multiple dimensions of relationships. This might be fruitful for exploring the implications of these findings *across* different age cohorts, and would potentially allow for generational experiences of relationships to be elucidated. The conclusions I have drawn in this chapter about gender also present an opportunity for researchers to examine the multiple ways in which gender impacts relationships. Finally, my attention towards the temporal and spatial dimensions of relationship experiences alongside intimate practices has underlined how they are integral to understanding relationship experiences. This

study, therefore, highlights how future relationship research in the social sciences should consider these dimensions of relating.

In the final section of this thesis, I turn my attention inward to provide some personal reflections on undertaking the research.

8.4 Researcher Reflections

In Chapter 1 I provided information about my reflective standpoint to contextualise my role in shaping the TTC study and this thesis. This centred on insider/outsider discussions about similarities and differences in identity and the implications of my role as an early career researcher. Throughout the analysis I have highlighted, using footnotes, areas of participant *experience* which have resonated with me in differing ways. These have sometimes been different to my own experiences, similar to my experiences, or have profoundly affected the way I think about relationships.

In Chapter 6, Hilarie's deeply emotional account of being rejected by her parents was a stark contrast to my own coming out. The similarities and differences in our experiences allowed me to develop understanding of a diverse participant group, and to reflect as a researcher. Going into the fieldwork, I was nervous due to having little experience with conducting interviews. My confidence grew with each interaction and reflection helped me gain insight into helpful research practice. The interview with Hilarie was the most challenging because she was so upset and clearly affected by her negative experiences. It did however give me confidence as a researcher in my ability to manage potentially difficult situations and to feel that I was able to create a safe environment for participants to disclose such sensitive information. Feedback from other participants also reinforced this. This exemplifies how certain interactions permitted me to reflect on the intersections between my lesbian identity and my researcher identity.

Another example illustrates how I feel conducting this research has profoundly impacted my perception of relationships and the relating behaviours I deem imperative to maintaining my own personal relationships. For instance, my reflections on relationship longevity in Chapter 5 and autonomy and separate togetherness in Chapter 7 detail how participant narratives align with my experiences and feelings around relationships. The notion that relationships have the potential to end resonated with me and I believe the couple dynamic has a large role to play here. The importance I place on achieving separate togetherness comes from being able to engage in the emotion work and relationship work involved in accepting and overcoming differences in the couple dynamic. This position has inevitably been affected by participant accounts. Conversely, I believe my personal relationship experiences and inclusion of personal reflections within the thesis have enhanced my analysis and understanding of the research.

Carrying out this PhD and researching an area with such personal relevance has, therefore, obviously had a great impact on my life, my relationships, and my perceptions. I think this is important to comprehend when drawing the final conclusions for the thesis. I exemplify this with a quote from my personal blog, written whilst writing up.

'This research has also been eye opening and has taught me an incredible amount that has had a personal impact for my outlook on life and relationships... For me, this PhD has been a journey of self-discovery...Perhaps that is because I am gay and can relate, perhaps that is because I am in the same age bracket as the participants or have experience of romantic relationships, and have experience of what life is like living in contemporary Britain. Maybe it is a combination of all of these. In a sense, I am one of my participants... I talk about the uncertain futures of individuals in today's society with increasing instability, and less expectations of dominant scripts to follow (...marriage, house, children). This is the context that I am also living in.'

[Pearson, 2014, personal blog]

Combined with my role as an early career researcher, I feel my insider/outsider status has given me a unique perspective on the lives of my participants. I feel strongly that I want to conduct meaningful and ethical research and represent my participants in a way which remains true to their identities and experiences because that is how I would want to be represented. Thus, I think that although I am 'one of the participants', my role as a researcher mediates this. My insider status, personal standpoint, and passionate feelings for ensuring voices like mine are heard have inevitably shaped my understanding of the analysis. My moral and ethical codes as a researcher ensure I attend to the nuances and diversity of experience.

One final thing to reflect on is Relate's involvement in the research, something I have needed to consider throughout. At times it was difficult to juggle my own interests with those of Relate, and the requirements of completing fieldwork for the *Enduring Love?* project. I mentioned in the introduction that the relationship support emphasis in this thesis is partly due to Relate's investment in the project. There were times when I felt as though the counselling dimension did not fit into the exploration of younger LGB couples or that it was too much to fit into one thesis. This is why I plan to write future publications on the relationship support aspect. However, counselling is an interest of mine and is something that I might pursue as a career. I think the integration of the counsellor data into the relationship support dimension of LGB couples works well and fits with my own interests for the research. This was an iterative process which developed over time through reformulating the research questions (see Appendix 11) and through writing up.

8.5 Concluding Remarks

The TTC study has made some crucial contributions to social science research in understanding the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples. Through appraising the vital biographical, socio-cultural, and temporal contexts of relationship experiences, and exploring the relationship practices of the couples in the study, I have highlighted how relationship experiences are diverse

and dependent on the individuals and couples involved. The participants' conceptions of long-term and happy relationships are bound to the biographical and socio-cultural contexts in which they are embedded. Outlining the experiences of the age cohort illuminates further understanding, including how the participants perceive long-term relationships through different stages which signify maturing into adulthood. Through such stages they are displaying their relationships as normal, linked to the zeitgeist of increased acceptance of LGB individuals and relationships. They also place increased importance on sex and display an optimism that their relationships will continue. Couples negotiate their everyday experiences whilst drawing on the past and envisioning the future, which involves multidimensional negotiations of time, space, and intimacy. The study has shown how couples facilitate closeness, traverse difficulties, and build their lives together in a number of ways. Reciprocity is crucial for this; it conveys commitment to the relationship for the long-term, including engaging in the important everyday acts which communicate love, trust, acceptance, and care. The participants displayed how their relationships are connected to the many other people in their lives such as family members and friends. As well as each other, these significant others, and sometimes relationship support services, played an important role in supporting couples in the trials, tribulations, and celebrations of their relationships. As such, couples are experiencing, supporting, and maintaining their relationships in diverse ways.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - LGB Participant Consent Form

Researcher: Danielle Pearson

The above named researcher has briefed me to my satisfaction on the research for which I have volunteered. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research and ask for my personal data to be destroyed. I recognise that there are certain points beyond which it will be impossible to withdraw from research – for instance when the thesis has been submitted. I understand that my rights to anonymity and confidentiality will be respected unless I share information which suggests my partner is at risk.

I agree to allow the researcher to keep my personal information on file after participation to allow future contact for further research purposes if necessary.

If taking part in the interviews, I agree to these being recorded.

Signature of participant:

Date:

If you would like more information about this project or about this consent form, before agreeing to take part then you can directly contact the researcher:

Danielle Pearson danielle.pearson@open.ac.uk

Or one of the research project supervisors:

Janet Fink: janet.fink@open.ac.uk

Jacqui Gabb: jacqui.gabb@open.ac.uk

Andreas Vossler: andreas.vossler@open.ac.uk

This research has been approved by the OU Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

Appendix 2 - LGB Participant Information Sheet

Who is the researcher and what is the research about?

Thank you for your interest in this study on LGB couples in long-term relationships. My name is Danielle Pearson and I am a postgraduate student at the Open University (danielle.pearson@open.ac.uk). I am conducting this research as part of my PhD research, which is being supervised by Dr Janet Fink, Dr Jacqui Gabb and Dr Andreas Vossler. It is linked to a larger project on couple relationships. I am collecting data to gain insight into how younger LGB couples experience and understand their relationships. This includes how they maintain their relationship, overcome difficulties and the resources they use for support.

Who is eligible to participate?

Any same-sex/LGB couple who deem themselves to be in a long-term relationship and are between the ages of 20-35 may participate.

What type of data are being collected?

I am collecting data using mixed methods consisting of a questionnaire, emotion maps, diaries and interviews (see attached method sheet for details). This means you will be expected to talk to me (the researcher) about your relationship and also complete an emotion map and a diary prior to the interviews. There will be an individual interview with each member of the couple followed by a couple interview.

What will participation involve?

Participation will involve completing a short questionnaire followed by recording events on an emotion map and in a diary for one week and then participating in two interviews. The attached method sheet gives you more detail into the procedure of the emotion map, diaries and interviews.

What will happen on the first meeting?

On the first meeting I will come to your home. Here I will explain the research process and then you will be asked to sign a consent form. At this point you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire about your relationship. Together, we will draw the emotion maps, I will give you materials for the diaries and we will arrange appropriate times to conduct the individual and the couple interviews. You will be given the opportunity to ask questions throughout the meeting. You will also be given my contact details should you have any further questions following the meeting.

What will happen in the interviews?

The interviews are explained in more detail on the attached methods sheet. All the interviews will be audio recorded in order to transcribe the data at a later point. The interviews can be arranged at a time convenient for both of you. The couple interview will usually be conducted on a separate occasion to the individual interviews.

Will I be identifiable?

The interviews will be transcribed by me (or someone hired for confidential transcription) and the transcript will be anonymised so any personally identifying information will be changed or removed. Pseudonyms (false names) will be used in any extracts quoted in my thesis and in any publications and presentations arising from the research. The emotion maps and diaries will also be anonymised in this way.

How will the data be used?

The data will be analysed in my PhD research. Anonymised extracts from the data may be quoted in the thesis and/or subsequent publications and presentations arising from it. All your experiences, statements and opinions will be treated with complete confidentiality unless you share information which suggests your partner is at risk. Your data may also be used in the larger

project on relationships. Agreeing to take part in the research means that you agree to this use of the information you provide.

What if I decide that I no longer wish to take part in the research during or after interviews?

Participation in this research is voluntary and all information provided is anonymous and confidential. You can decline to answer any question in the interview, without giving a reason, and stop at any time, again, without giving a reason. If you decide you want to withdraw from the research after participating, please contact me via email and we will discuss this. Please note there are certain points beyond which it will be impossible to withdraw from research – for instance when my thesis has been submitted. Therefore, it is strongly recommended you withdraw within a month of participation if you wish to do so.

What are the benefits of taking part?

You will get the opportunity to share your experiences and understandings of being part of a couple and tell me your story. You will also play an important role in informing understanding of the relational experiences and understandings of young same-sex couples.

Are there any risks in taking part?

I don't anticipate any particular risks with participating in this research – indeed I hope you will find completing the research an interesting and fulfilling experience. If you are interested in finding information on relationship support services which are available in the UK, you can contact organisations directly using the following link:

<http://www8.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/enduringlove/affiliates/third-sector-organisations>

If you have any questions about this research please contact: Danielle Pearson, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA. Email: danielle.pearson@open.ac.uk

Or one of the project supervisors:

Janet Fink janet.fink@open.ac.uk

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This research has been approved by the OU Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

Appendix 3 - LGB Participant Method Sheet

Emotion maps

Emotion maps aim to find out about your everyday experiences as these take place around your home. In this sense, they ask you to think about and 'locate' what you do and where in terms of your couple relationship and also your wider relationships with other people.

To begin, I will accompany you around your house and draw up a floor plan. This forms the basis of your emotion map. It will be transferred to a Word document and will be returned to you along with a set of coloured stickers. These stickers will include the following emoticons:



Laughter



Happy



No
Emotion



Sad



Distressed



Angry



Physical
Affection

This method is completed individually by participants over the course of a one week period. Different colours should be used for the different people you wish to represent, including you, your partner, children (if any), family, friends, pets, and so on.

You can complete it over the course of each day as and when you have time or at the end of the day, thinking back to what has happened and where. The emoticons are used to indicate some of the kinds of emotions that you may have experienced over the week.

Once this method is completed you should send or give your emotion map to me and I will make a copy. This will be used as the basis of the first interview, where you will be asked to talk through your week, with reference to the emotion map, and the experiences, interactions and feelings that you represented using the selected emoticons.

Visual Scrapbook/Diaries

Visual Scrapbook/Diaries aim to find out about your everyday routines, for example what you did and when. You should complete your scrapbook/diary over the same one week period as your emotion map, at a time and in a place that suits you. You can use it to reflect upon any aspect of your relationship during the week, writing as little or as much as you like.

In your visual scrapbook/diary you could include mementos (if any) of any time you spend together with your partner. These could take the form of TV guide clippings or receipts for the cinema, for example, or maybe the label from a bottle of wine or beer, a menu from a meal out or take away, or the packaging from a shared meal at home. You can include pictures that you have taken (perhaps from your online accounts such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter or Pinterest etc.). The scrapbook/diary format is flexible. You can use the notebook given to you by me, a Word document on a computer, or an Outlook calendar on your phone. Use whatever works for you. Photos can be attached to an electronic file and sent back to me. I will be happy to print these out for you. You can then simply describe where they fit in your diary and leave a space for them.

In your scrapbook/diary, I would like you to include your experiences of some or all of the following areas:

- Time spent with your partner and without your partner
- Any thoughts, feelings, conversations or interactions that have been important to you and that may have made you think about your relationship.
- Anything that you or your partner have done (gestures, actions, words) for each other
- Anything that you have done for yourself
- One or more forms of written/textual interaction important to your day such as a text message, an email, a website or article you have read, a Facebook status, a Tweet or a blog etc.

- One or more forms of imagery important to your day such as a picture. This can be taken yourselves or from internet e.g. Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat or it can be something you draw.

Once you have completed your scrapbook/diary please send or give it back to me in whatever format you have chosen. I will make a copy and, along with the emotion map, this will be used as the basis of the first interview, when I will talk to you about your week with reference to the scrapbook/diary and the experiences and interactions that you included.

I have an example scrapbook to show you in the first meeting so don't worry too much! I will help you as much as I can.

Interview 1: Individual - you

Interview 2: Individual – your partner

Your individual interview is in two halves and will be completed with you on your own.

In the first half of the interview I will invite you to talk about experiences and different relationships across your life.

During the second half of this interview you and I will talk through the events and experiences you have described in your scrapbook/diary and shown on your emotion map. You can tell me about the detail of these events, what they mean to you and fill in any gaps that you have identified. For example, you may want to talk about something you forgot to include at the time or perhaps say more about an experience you may have only briefly described in your diary.

Interview 3: Couple Interview

In the second interview I will talk to you and your partner together. This will ordinarily be completed on a separate day to your individual interview.

For this interview, I would like you to create three collages together as a couple which will be used as a basis for what you will talk about. I will ask you to respond to these collages, to reflect on how they connect with your personal experience and/or opinions on long-term relationships and how you decided what to include in your collages.

The three collages should be created around three themes which are *intimacy*, *your relationship future* and *public/private boundaries*. These themes are explained below:

- Intimacy
 - A visual collage that details the practices of intimacy important to your relationship which could be emotional, physical or sexual e.g. cuddling, kissing, sex, sharing your feelings. The things you do that you think are intimacy and that help sustain your relationship.
- Relationship Future
 - A visual collage which includes your future aspirations for your relationship, perhaps the things you think you might want, have or do in five, ten or fifteen years. Examples might be marriage/civil partnership, children, a particular job or your home.
- Public/Private Boundaries
 - A visual collage that represents the ways in which the outside world might overlap with or affect your relationship. This could be other relationships you have in your life (e.g. family, friends, and work colleagues), the effect of the government, media or interactions with strangers that you may think important (e.g. the law, portrayal of relationships/sexual orientation).

The format of these collages is flexible and completely up to you but should include approximately 4-8 images that depicts the above themes relevant to your relationship. You could use photos from Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, your Mobile Phones, Cameras; maps from

Foursquare; pins from Pinterest; sourced images and text; and/or your own drawings. To create you collage you could simply use a magazine (or your own photos) and pritt stick or there are several computer and mobile phone apps available to create digital collages. If you need any guidance then I will assist wherever needed.

The collages will need to be created together and prior to this interview.

Appendix 4 - LGB Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Thank you for indicating an interest in participating in my research. I am studying young same-sex couples in long-term relationships and what these relationships mean for people today.

Please complete this questionnaire and tell me about yourself and your relationship. I will also require your partner to fill out a questionnaire. The questionnaire will help me to learn a bit more about you before research participation.

Filling out this questionnaire should take about 5-10 minutes. I appreciate your time and your thoughts.

All answers will be treated as strictly confidential and data will be anonymised. No personal information will be shared with any third party. This research operates within the 'Statement of Ethical Practice' issued by the British Sociological Association (BSA) and ethical guidelines of the Open University.

You are also not obliged to answer every question.

Questions about your relationship(s)

1	Are you currently in a same-sex long-term couple relationship?		
	Yes	No (Sorry, you will be unable to participate)	Other (please specify)

2	Approximately, how long have you been in this current relationship?		
	Under 1 year	1-2 years	2-5 years
	5+ years		

3	How would you best describe your relationship?		
Tick as many as apply			
	Civil Partnership	Living together	Couple—not living together
	Going out/Dating	Planning a Civil Partnership/Marriage	Not planning on Marriage/Civil Partnership
	Other (please specify)		

4	Is your relationship monogamous?		
	Yes	No (please specify)	

5	In general, how would you define a long-term relationship?		
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5	In general, how would you define a long-term relationship?			
Tick as many as apply				
	Length of time spent together		Having children	Being a family
	Shared commitment		Legal Recognition	Other (please specify)

6	Have you had other long-term relationships?			
	Yes		No	
If yes, how many?				
Approximately, how long did your last long-term relationship last?				
	Under 1 year		1-5 years	5+ years

7	Your relationship				
Each statement below is followed by a series of five possible responses. Read each statement carefully and decide which response best describes your relationship with your partner.					
Please tick the corresponding response.					
sd = strongly disagree					
d = disagree					
nad = neither agree/disagree					
a = agree					
sa = strongly agree					
	sd	d	nad	a	sa
We enjoy each other's company					
Family members get too involved in our relationship					
Compromise is crucial in our relationship					
Our relationship goes through ups and downs					
Our relationship is mainly about practicalities such as domestic chores and money					
We are both equally affectionate					
I am totally committed to making this relationship work					
This is the relationship I always dreamed of					
We have shared values					
Sex is an important part of our relationship					
Faith shapes our relationship					
I am content in our relationship					
Raising children together makes our relationship stronger (leave blank if you are not a parent)					

8	You and your partner				
Each statement is followed by a series of five possible responses. Read each statement carefully and decide which response best describes your partner and your feelings towards them.					
Please tick the corresponding response. sd = strongly disagree d = disagree nad = neither agree/disagree a = agree sa = strongly agree					
	sd	d	nad	a	sa
My partner is usually aware of my needs					
My partner makes me laugh					
I think of my partner as my soul mate					
My partner doesn't always listen to me					
Infidelity would break our relationship					
I think I love my partner more than they love me					
I can forgive my partner					
We enjoy an open, non-monogamous relationship					
I sometimes feel lonely even when I am with my partner					
Being with my partner broadens my horizons					
My partner wants to have sex more often than I do					
My partner has annoying habits					
We have grown apart over time					

9	Take a few moments to think about the following questions and decide which response best describes how you are feeling.				
Take a few moments to think about the following questions and decide which response best describes how you are feeling.					
Please tick the corresponding response. 1 = very unhappy 2 = unhappy 3 = neither 4 = happy 5 = very happy					
	1	2	3	4	5
How happy are you with your life overall?					
How happy are you with your relationship overall?					
How happy are you with your partner overall?					

10 What you 'do' in your relationship					
Each statement is followed by five possible responses. Read each statement carefully and decide which response best describes what you and your partner do together on a regular basis.					
Please tick the corresponding response.					
1 = never					
2 = occasionally					
3 = sometimes					
4 = often					
5 = always	1	2	3	4	5
We make time to be together, on our own					
We share our domestic chores fairly					
We say "I love you" to each other					
We lead separate lives					
We share our financial resources fairly					
We give each other gifts and/or cards					
We argue over money					
We are there for each other					
We talk to each other about everything					
We share a bedroom					
I support my partner financially					
We take part in our local community					
We pursue shared interests					

11 Who is the most important person in your life?	
Please tick only one box	
<input type="checkbox"/> My child/ren	<input type="checkbox"/> Friend
<input type="checkbox"/> My partner	<input type="checkbox"/> Mother
<input type="checkbox"/> Father	<input type="checkbox"/> Brother
<input type="checkbox"/> Sister	<input type="checkbox"/> Self
<input type="checkbox"/> Other family members	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
Can you explain why?	

12	Do you talk about your relationship to any of the following people?			
Please tick as many as apply				
	My child/ren		Father	
	My partner		Brother	
	Friend/s		Sister	
	Mother		Neighbours	
	Other (please specify)			

13	Have you had any experience of couple counselling?	
	Yes	No
If yes, where did you go for counselling?		

14a	Identify two things that you like <i>best</i> about your relationship.
14b	Identify two things that you like <i>least</i> about your relationship.
14c	Identify two things that your partner does for you that make you <i>feel appreciated</i>.

Questions about yourself

1	How old are you?

2	What is your gender?		
	Female	Male	Other (please state)

3	What is your sexual orientation?			
	Non-heterosexual		Gay	
	Bisexual		Queer	
				Lesbian
				Other (please specify)

4	Do you have any children?			
	Yes		No	
If yes, how old are they?				
If you don't have children, do you want them in the future?				
	Yes		No	
				Maybe
Have you and your partner discussed having children?				
	Yes		No	

5	Which of the following groups most adequately describes your ethnic origin?			
White		Mixed		
	British		White and Black Caribbean	
	Other White background		White and Black African	
Black or Black British			White and Asian	
	Caribbean		Other – Mixed background	
	African	Asian or Asian British		
	Other Black background		Indian	
Other			Pakistani	
	Other Ethnic background		Bangladeshi	
	Not known		Chinese	
	Would rather not say		Other Asian background	

6	How would you best describe your employment status?			
	Employed Full-Time			
	Employed Part-Time		Self-Employed	
	Not employed, looking for work		Full-time student	
	Full-time homemaker or carer		Retired	
	Volunteer		Disabled, not able to work	
	Other (please specify)			

7	If you are in employment, what is your job title?

8	What is your highest educational qualification?		
	No formal qualification		GCSE (O levels)
	NVQ level		A levels/AS levels
	Other vocational qualification (please specify)		Professional qualifications (please specify)
	Undergraduate degree		Postgraduate (Masters/PhD)
	Other (please specify)		

9	What is your religion?		
	Buddhist		Sikh
	Muslim		Jewish
	Hindu		No religion
	Christian (incl. Church of England, Catholic & other denominations)		Other (please specify)

10	How well would you say you and your partner are managing financially these days? Would you say you are...?		
	Living comfortably		
	Doing alright		
	Just about getting by		
	Finding it quite difficult		
	Finding it very difficult		

11	Which of the following describes your individual/joint current housing arrangements?		
	Own your own home outright		
	Buying your own home (e.g. have a mortgage)		
	Rent from local authority		
	Rent privately		
	Other (please specify)		

12	Which of the following describes your individual/joint current housing arrangements?
	Living together as a couple alone
	Living together as a couple with friends/housemates/parents
	Living with friends/housemates
	Living with parents
	Living alone
	Other (please specify)

13	Have any of the following events happened to you and/or your partner in the past two years?
House move	Separation and/or divorce
Marriage	Serious illness
Moving in together	Redundancy or becoming unemployed
Bereavement	Starting work
Birth of child	Other new person joining household
Miscarriage	Starting college/uni/educational course
Other (please specify)	

14	Is there anything further that you'd like to tell me about yourself or your relationship?

15	If you and your partner are willing to participate in this research, please would you provide me with contact details for further information.
Name	
House No & Postcode	
Email	
Phone number	

Appendix 5 - LGB Participant Debrief Sheet

Thank you very much for your participation in this research. I hope that the results will be very positive for research on same-sex couples and on long-term relationships. Your valuable contributions to my PhD project are greatly appreciated and I thank you for taking the time to share your understandings and experiences with me.

You are reminded that your participation in this study is completely confidential and your data will be handled respectfully and sensitively. If you wish to withdraw your data, you can do so at any time. If you would like to know the outcome of the research or wish to do any further reading for your own interests, do not hesitate to contact me at any time and I will supply you with readings or information. Additionally, if you would like transcripts of your interviews then these can be sent to you once they have been transcribed.

There may be further scope for future research, please let me know if you would be happy to be contacted for this.

Contact Information

The Researcher

Danielle Pearson danielle.pearson@open.ac.uk

www.trialstribulationscelebrations.wordpress.com

The Supervisors

Janet Fink: janet.fink@open.ac.uk

Jacqui Gabb: jacqui.gabb@open.ac.uk

Andreas Vossler: andreas.vossler@open.ac.uk

If you are interested in finding information on relationship support services which are available in the UK, you can contact organisations directly using the following link:

<http://www8.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/enduringlove/affiliates/third-sector-organisations>

Again, thank you very much for your participation in this research.

This research has been approved by the OU Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

Appendix 6 - Counsellor Participant Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. Please read this consent form, tick the relevant boxes and sign at the bottom.

I..... agree to participate in this research. I have been informed about the nature of the research project and the nature of my participation in this project. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I have been informed of my right to withdraw from the research at any time (within the limits specified in the information sheet), without giving a reason. I understand that any information I provide will be confidential and anonymous. I am over 16 years of age.

Please tick the following boxes:

- ☐ I agree to participate in a focus group on the topic of working with same-sex couples
- ☐ I agree to the focus group being audio-recorded and transcribed for the purposes of research. I understand that anonymised extracts of the focus group transcript may be quoted in the researcher's PhD thesis, and in any academic publications or presentations arising from the research.
- ☐ I agree to the collection of demographic data that will be compiled into a table and may be reported in the researcher's PhD thesis and in any publications or presentations arising from the research.

I confirm that I have read the information above and give my consent to participate in this research.

Signature of the participant:.....

Signature of the researcher:.....

Date:.....

If you have any questions about this research please contact: Danielle Pearson, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA. Email: danielle.pearson@open.ac.uk.

If you have any concerns about the focus group discussion or my conduct during this time, then please contact Dr Janet Fink: Janet.Fink@open.ac.uk

This research has been approved by the Relate Institute Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 7 - Counsellor Participant Information Sheet

Who are the researchers and what is the research about?

Thank you for your interest in this study on counsellors' views and experiences of working with same-sex couples. My name is Danielle Pearson and I am a postgraduate student at the Open University (danielle.pearson@open.ac.uk). I am conducting this research as part of my PhD research, which is being supervised by Dr Janet Fink, Dr Jacqui Gabb and Dr Andreas Vossler. I am collecting data to gain insight into counsellors' views and experiences of working with same-sex couples. The focus groups will form part of a larger project exploring young same-sex couples in long-term relationships.

Who is eligible to participate?

Anyone who works as a Relate counsellor may participate.

What type of data are being collected?

I am collecting data using focus group discussion. A focus group is simply a group discussion 'focused' on a particular topic or theme. One of the purposes of focus groups is to closely replicate how we express views and form opinions in real life. This means that you will be expected to talk to each other, as well as to me (the moderator), and to indicate when you agree and disagree with each other. I am interested in your views and opinions on the topic and I'd like the focus group to be a lively discussion; there are no right or wrong answers to the questions you will be asked to discuss! Before the focus group you will be invited to answer some *demographic questions*. This is for me to gain a sense of who is taking part in the research.

What will participation in the focus group involve?

The focus group will involve around 4-8 participants and a moderator (me). Another female postgraduate student may act as my assistant. She will take notes which capture group

interaction and note down who is speaking and when. The focus group discussion will be audio-recorded. It should last around 30 minutes (but please allow for up to 45 minutes to an hour). In the group, you will be asked to talk about your views and experiences on Relate counsellors' experiences of working with same-sex couples. I will agree a time and venue for the focus group that is convenient for all the participants.

What will happen on the day?

Once everyone has arrived, you will be given a name badge and you will be asked to read and sign a consent form. I can send you a copy of the consent form in due course if you wish to receive it. You will also be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire which asks for background information about you and your areas of interest. The procedure of the focus group will be explained and you will be given an opportunity to ask any questions that you might have. Everyone will then be asked to agree on some ground rules for the group (such as not speaking when others are speaking, respecting other people's experiences and opinions). Once everyone is happy for the group to begin, recording will begin and the first question will be asked. You will be given another opportunity to ask questions at the end of the group.

Will I be identifiable?

The focus group will be transcribed by me and the transcript will be anonymised so any personally identifying information will be changed or removed. The Relate centre you practice at will not be identified. Pseudonyms will be used in any extracts quoted in my thesis and in any publications and presentations arising from the research.

How will the data be used?

The data from the focus groups will be used to inform my same-sex couple interviews and will be analysed in my PhD research. Anonymised extracts from the data may be quoted in the thesis and/or subsequent publications and presentations arising from it. The demographic data will be

compiled into a table and may be used as contextual information for my analysis. All your statements and opinions will be treated with complete confidentiality. Agreeing to take part in the research means that you agree to this use of the information you provide.

What if I decide that I no longer wish to take part in the research during or after the focus group?

Participation in this research is voluntary and all information provided is anonymous and confidential. You can decline to answer any question in the focus group, without giving a reason, and leave the focus group at any time, again, without giving a reason. Please also respect the confidentiality of the other participants and do not disclose any information from the focus group discussion with other people. If you decide you want to withdraw from the research after participating, please contact me via email and we will discuss this. As you can imagine, withdrawing data from an individual participant from a transcript of a focus group discussion is not straightforward! But I will do my best to withdraw your data without jeopardising the participation of the other members of the focus group. Please note that there are certain points beyond which it will be impossible to withdraw from research – for instance when my thesis has been submitted. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that you withdraw within a month of participation if you wish to do so.

What are the benefits of taking part?

You will get the opportunity to participate in a lively and interesting discussion on the experiences of working with same-sex couples. You will be able to share and develop your views on an important participant group. You will play an important role in informing understanding of attitudes towards and experiences of working with same-sex couples within Relate.

Are there any risks in taking part?

I don't anticipate any particular risks with participating in this research – indeed, I hope you will find completing the focus group an interesting experience. However, there is always the potential for research participation to unexpectedly raise uncomfortable or distressing issues. If you do feel distressed after taking part, please seek support from your Relate counsellor as per usual Relate protocol.

If you have any questions about this research please contact: Danielle Pearson, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA.

Email: danielle.pearson@open.ac.uk

This research has been approved by the Relate Institute Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 8 - Counsellor Participant Demographic Questionnaire

In order for me to learn about the range of people taking part in this research, I would be grateful if you could answer the following questions. All information provided is anonymous.

Please either write your answer in the space provided, or circle the answer, or answers, that best apply to you.

1	How old are you?		
2	I am:	Male	Other: _____
		Female	
3	How would you describe your sexuality?	Heterosexual Lesbian/Gay Bisexual Non-heterosexual Other: _____	
3	Are you currently in a long-term relationship?	Yes No Other: _____	
4	How would you best describe your relationship status?	Married Civil Partnership Couple – Living together Couple – Not living together Dating Other: _____	
5	In general, how would you define a long-term relationship? (tick as many as apply)	Length of time spent together Having children Being a family Shared commitment Being married Other: _____	
6	What is your highest education level? (e.g. postgraduate degree, doctorate etc.)		

7	How would you best describe your employment status?	Employed or self-employed, 1-34 hours a week Employed or self-employed, 35+ hours a week Unemployed Full-time student Retired Full time homemaker or carer Unable to work Volunteer Other: _____
8	What is your professional job title?	
9	Which of the following groups most adequately describes your ethnic origin?	White British Other White background Black or Black British Caribbean African Other Black background Asian or Asian British Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi Chinese Other Asian background Mixed White and Black Caribbean White and Black African White and Asian Other Mixed background Other Other Ethnic background Not known Would rather not say
10	How many years counselling experience do you have?	
11	How would you describe the extent of your experience of working with same-sex couples?	No experience Limited experience Moderate experience Extensive experience Other: _____
12	Have you received any specific training in working with same-sex couples? (e.g. CPD workshops etc; please specify)	

Thank you for your time.

Appendix 9 - Counsellor Focus Group Schedule

Introduction:

Welcome – thank participants, introduce self and topics

Overview of procedure – length and format of session

Ground Rules – confidentiality; value range of opinions; okay to disagree

Ice Breaker Q – Say an interesting fact about yourself?

Hi, my name is ... I work at Relate ... and *interesting fact*

1 – How much experience does everyone have of working with same-sex couples? Do you think it requires different skills? What are your attitudes held in relation to working with same sex couples? Has working with same-sex couples changed any of your previous views and attitudes towards them?

2 – What kind of issues might you expect same-sex couples to come to counselling with? What kind of relationship work do they do? Are there similarities/differences from heterosexual couple experiences? If so, what might these be?

3 – Has anyone encountered any success stories or difficulties working with same-sex couples? Has it been challenging or rewarding or a learning curve?

4 – How important is counsellor self-disclosure of sexuality in working with same-sex couples? Has anyone encountered problems with self-disclosure of sexuality? Has anyone found that it has helped the therapeutic relationship?

5 - Has anyone had any training for working with LGB couples and individuals? As practitioners, what do you believe are the gaps in knowledge and skills that might be addressed by further training? What ideas do you have about the sort of training that might be beneficial to receive?

Conclusion:

- Round off/sum up (say what you got from the session; how valuable all views were; reiterate confidentiality)

- Give participants opportunity to ask YOU any questions

- Thank everyone again and close the session

Appendix 10 - Analysis Coding Framework

Node #	Tree Node	Child Nodes	Description	Additional Descriptions	Codes/Areas	Comments
1	Intimacy	Emotional	Couple connectedness - broad definition of intimacy		Emotion Work Closeness Distance Affection Sex Shared Experiences	Incorporating previous nodes of sharing experiences
		Physical				
		Sexual				
2	Resources	Self	Resources drawn upon and/or available for support of relationship		Each Other – Gestures, Picking up slack Other – Play, Laughter, Role Models, Research Interaction	Incorporating previous nodes of resources, support, self
		Each Other				
		Significant Others				
		Counselling				
		Other				
3	Time	Past	References to time including past, present and future, as well as changes over time and time periods (long and short term), time together & time apart etc.	Past – refs to past Present – events and activities Future – imaginings and planning for future	Money Work Leisure Proximity Relationship Work Everyday - Division of Labour, Mundane, Routines	Incorporating previous nodes of relational journey
		Present - Everyday				
		Future - Home Building - Family Planning - Marriage/CP				
4	Relationship Constructions	Biographical	Factors that affect the way in which couples are experiencing their relationships and constructing them – all contextual information about couples	Biography - Individual differences, ideologies etc. External - situatedness, embeddedness, location, other relationships Identity - Social roles and demographics		Incorporating previous nodes of External Env. into external
		External				
		Identity				
5	Space/Place/Home		Talk about home and space and place, moving		Home, Location, Mobility Belonging Boundaries Travel	

6	Conflict		Mentions of difficulties, arguments, niggles, and temper etc		Conflict Difficulties Difference Tension	
7	Age/Generation		Anything that may be related to age or implied because of their age Mentions or comparisons with different generations, role models, social change etc		Age Generation Society	
8	Couple Dynamics		Couples own observations about dynamics and any other insights into couple dynamic	Being yourself, feeling comfortable around partner, feeling like they fit together well Talk surrounding compromise, meeting in middle etc.	Comfort, Compatibility Compromise Communication Couple Display Gender	
9	Relationship Rules		Relationship rules and boundaries - monogamy, infidelity, boundaries of communication and intimacy etc		Roles Definitions/Status Monogamy	
10	Health & Well-Being		References to health and well-being including both mental and physical, conditions, stress, anxiety etc	Incorporating positive and negative aspects of well-being e.g. happiness & unhappiness	Mood Emotions	
11	Methods		Anything related to the methods - specific mentions etc, final question on how participation has been			Can be used for further analysis of methods
12	Gold Dust/ Moments		Great quotes that can drive analysis			

Appendix 11 – Research Question Development

Beginning

- 1) What relationships characteristics define a relationship as 'long-term'?
- 2) How do couples engaged in long-term relationships negotiate and manage difficulties in their relationship?
- 3) How do positive interactions help to maintain and enrich long-term relationships?
- 4) Do couples from different socio-demographic backgrounds maintain their relationships in different ways?
- 5) How do couples perceive their relationships over time?

Revised 1

- 1) What are the experiences, views and opinions of relationship counsellors on treating same-sex couples?
- 2) What relationship characteristics enable same-sex couples to define their relationship as 'long-term'?
- 3) How do positive interactions help to maintain and enrich long-term relationships of same-sex couples?
- 4) How do same-sex couples engaged in long-term relationships negotiate and manage difficulties in their relationship?
- 5) How can the characteristics of long-term same-sex couple relationships help inform relationship therapists in their practice and training?

Revised 2

- 1) How do couple counsellors experience working with young same-sex couples?
- 2) How do young same-sex couples experience and understand their relationship in terms of:
 - the characteristics through which they define a 'long-term' and 'happy' relationship
 - their negotiation and management of relationship difficulties
 - the resources (for example friends, family, counselling) that sustain their relationship

Revised 3

- 1) How do young same-sex couples experience and understand their relationship in terms of:
 - the characteristics through which they define a 'long-term' and 'happy' relationship
 - their negotiation and management of relationship difficulties
 - the resources (for example friends, family, counselling) that sustain their relationship
- 2) What knowledge do Relate counsellors have of same-sex couple relationships, particularly with regard to:
 - their understandings of same-sex couple relationships
 - their attitudes towards possible difficulties faced by same-sex couples
 - their experiences of working with same-sex couples

Revised 4

- 1) What are the experiences of young same-sex couples in contemporary Britain?
 - a) How are these shaped by personal and/or socio-cultural understandings of 'long-term' and 'happy' relationships?
 - b) How do they manage and negotiate their everyday lives together?
 - c) What resources (for example friends, family, counselling, and the research encounter) are available to support their relationship?

Final

What are the relationship experiences of younger LGB couples in the UK?

- a) How are these shaped by personal and/or socio-cultural understandings of 'long-term' and 'happy' relationships?
- b) How do they manage and negotiate their everyday lives together?
- c) What resources (for example friends, family, counselling, and the research encounter) are available to support their relationship?